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SOCIETY

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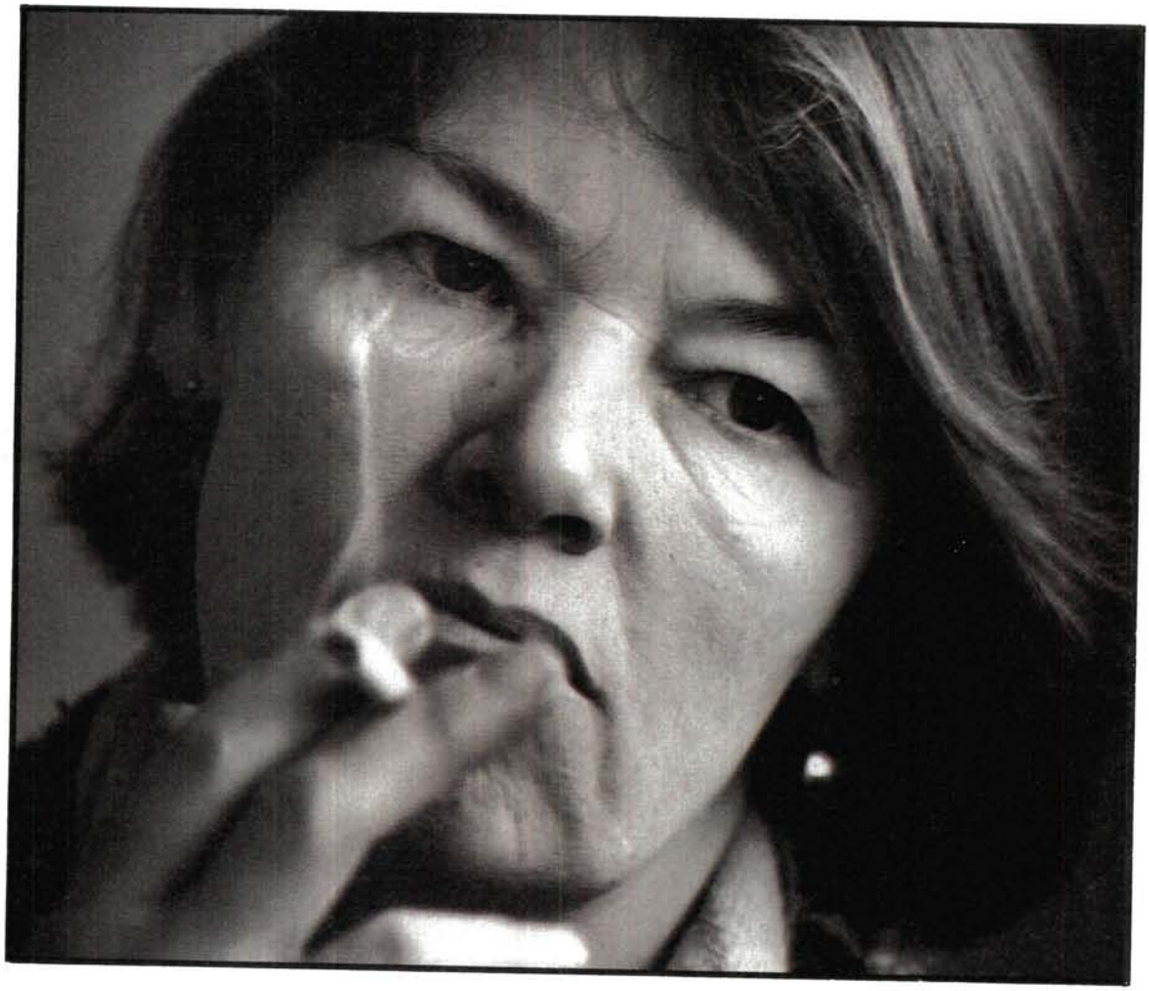

The foetus rules and mothers are made criminals; a cautionary US tale

R W Johnson: Thatcher in the bunker

New fiction: Hanif Kureishi, Kingsley Amis, Michèle Roberts

Into the men's room

Glenda Jackson may become a Labour MP. She's rare. Women find it difficult to make it as a candidate—never mind getting into Parliament

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CONTENTS

NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY

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Features

Blood from a stone 10
In Stevenage new town ordinary people want to shoot the Prime Minister—Maria Manning reports

Stand: Public enemy 17
The purpose of Pogo-ism is to make us guilty. Alexander Cockburn takes issue

What's up doc? 20
Bob Woffinden watched "Who Bombed Birmingham?" and questions the tradition of documentary drama.

Regulars

Editorial 4
Lithuania is the first test of the new democratic Europe. And the west is failing it

Word-bites 5
Canterbury Tales; Anarchy in the TGWU; Space oddities; The end of the War on Want

Letters 6

Steve Bell 7

Diary 8
Sean French, plus verses by Roger Woddis

Political Column 22
A convenient illness could lend dignity to Mrs Thatcher's ignominious departure, says R W Johnson

Endgames 55
Competition: Dr Johnson reflects on Wet T-Shirt competitions and shopping malls; Graffiti by Paige

Contributors 55

Cover: Peter Macdermiad/*The Independent*

12 The beast awakes

Democratic internationalism is the only protection against the oppressive forces unleashed by the nationalist revival, argues Fred Halliday

14 Token gestures

Glenda Jackson, Labour's new Hampstead candidate, gets star treatment. But the party fails to choose strong women for other seats —Kirsty Milne reports and talks to four women lost to Westminster

28 Essay: Tyranny of the foetus

A woman is rebuked for drinking wine in a restaurant, another dies after a caesarian enforced by court order. Katha Pollitt on making criminals of pregnant women in America

31 Spring books: From sex to sax

Reviewers explore romance, jazz, murder and rebellion, listen to moaners in Moscow and read between the lines of Establishment obituaries

48 The last gasp

Buried in the TV schedules is Irish poet Damian Gorman's exploration of grief, guilt, love and panic—Paul Morley on death on the box

Society 23

NHS: Two hospitals fight to opt out of opting out
Tax: The married couple's allowance doesn't help wives
Fringe Benefits: Stop buying the Sundays—and save the forests!
Work: Women on the cheap
Welfare Watch: The poll tax rebate scheme is unfair to couples
Society Today: Industrial action

Spring Books 31

History: Cyril Lin's Chinese underdogs; Arthur Marwick's British top-dogs
Romance high and low: Elizabeth Wilson on sexual archetypes; Angela McRobbie on blockbusters
Murder: Jenny Diski on Tony Parker's lifers
Fiction: Hanif Kureishi; Kingsley Amis; Michèle Roberts
Also: Moscow blues; the sexy sax; new paperbacks

Artefax 42

Art: Robert Hewison on the real and the fake Yoko Ono
Interview: with playwright Sarah Daniels
Music: Knitting Factory tour
Film: Spielberg's love story
Analysis: Roland Barthes revisited
TV: Paul Morley on death on the box

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EDITORIAL

Beyond nationalism

Lithuania is the first test of the new democratic Europe. And the west is failing it

Andrzej Krauze

Lithuania has been invaded bit by bit. No shots have been fired—yet; and they may never be. But the Lithuanians, who were forced by Stalin at gunpoint into the Soviet Union in 1939, are again staring down the barrels of Soviet tanks. You can't exactly say the west has been silent; but there hasn't been a single protest by the self-appointed guardians of freedom, only temporising platitudes.

The seizure of breakaway Communist Party buildings by the Soviet army; the arrest of young deserters in their hospital refuge; an anti-government rally sponsored and advertised by the army; the shift from a pledge of no violence to a grim "no violence, unless..."; the expulsion of foreign observers. There are all the makings of an incident which will give the Soviet army its excuse to drop pretences and clamp down hard. Negotiation, restraint, patience on both sides? Yes, of course. But anger, protest, ice-sharp awareness of Lithuania's historic injustice and present peril—the Lithuanians need all that far more.

Mrs Thatcher apologised this week to Czechoslovakia for 1938 and 1968, but she hasn't given the forthright declaration on Lithuania's behalf which these apologies might seem to demand, perhaps because the cold war's unspoken doctrines of non-interference in the two empires' spheres of influence still hold sway. Certainly, watching Bush's lips is no more productive than watching Eisenhower's was when Hungary was crushed in 1956; while his ineffable vice-president sympathises with the provocative round-up of a handful of deserters. Mitterrand, worse, calls Lithuania "an inseparable part of the USSR"

West and east, of course, the stability of the Russian empire matters more than the fate of a tiny nation. After Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. Then the Ukraine, most dangerous of all to the integrity of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev is still the man that Bush, Thatcher and the rest want to do business with, the man who can assure a stable and conservative European order. The Baltic states are only pawns in this game. And after all, they still have empires of sorts to police; they need the freedom of manoeuvre to coerce a Nicaragua or Cuba, invade a Grenada or Panama, take out an irritating ship in New Zealand, declare an unnecessary war in the south Atlantic. They too put territorial integrity before almost anything else and think uneasily of their own minorities. Above all, they understand the "necessities of state".

But isn't there an internationalist left? What has it to say to Vilnius? Silence. There too Gorbymania rules: the great man as saviour. No spontaneous demonstrations, no outrage, just acquiescence.

Yet this is the point, between the rock and the hard place, when anyone who believes in democracy must speak out. A common European home requires a democratic Soviet Union, made up of a freely associated federation of nations. But Gorbachev, the unelected executive president, was not chosen to preside over the dismembering of the Russian empire. The decision to put military pressure on Vilnius was his alone; it wasn't "forced" on him by his generals, nor by the Lithuanians. Sure, they have been "impatient" and "tactless". Just like peoples denied self-determination everywhere—in, for example, South Africa, Tibet, Tigre. And where else have we heard self-serving arguments about a "domino effect" used to deny small nations self-determination?

The fact is that Lithuania poses no more danger to Russia's power or integrity than Nicaragua has to the US. It is a small nation which will always remain economically, and to some extent politically, dependent upon its giant neighbour. Of course, its independence has to be negotiated; and can't be taken at a stroke. But no more can its people be coerced and harassed militarily, and be forced into "negotiations" which may take a generation or more to fulfil their expectations. And how else are they to kick-start those negotiations other than by seizing the initiative themselves?

Europe needs a new politics in the wake of the Year of Revolutions. That new politics will be founded on the call by Vaclav Havel and his foreign minister Dienstbier for a new European order based on democratic institutions and human rights. It means, in the end, a Europe *beyond nationalism*, in which "national sovereignty" and "national security"—the terms trotted out by Gorbachev and his western apologists—are phrases which history has emptied of meaning.

Lithuania is one of the first tests of such ideals. If the crisis is to be resolved, then clearly it will demand the intervention of a galvanised international public opinion which will take up the first direct calls for support from Walesa and Michnik in Poland and ally not with Gorbachev, but with the democratic and anti-militarist movements in the Soviet Union.

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The wrong stuff

The Anglo-Soviet Juno Space mission always owed more to the world of Ealing comedy than of NASA. Plucky little Britain, with a little help from the USSR, would launch its own space programme on a shoestring. The American Apollo mission was staffed with military pilots, while the amiable British pair, Timothy Mace and Helen Sharman, looked like also-rans on the Krypton Factor.

As a business enterprise it owed more to the Sock Shop management style than the combination between government and big business which funded the absurdly expensive US space programme of the 1960s. The government quite rightly put no money into the project; instead the organisers sought commercial sponsors, bizarrely approaching not science-based organisations but consumer companies.

The Russians spoke of international friendship but what they were really interested in was hard foreign currency—even if it had to be sterling. The mission was budgeted at a suspiciously bargain-basement £16 million. But it has been suggested that less than £2 million has so far been raised, and the project now faces well-deserved collapse.

Britain in the 1980s generated many well-publicised companies that filled no real need and shrivelled in the cold air of recession. The Juno project was of the same kind: its purpose was simply its own hype. There is a respectable argument that crewed space flight has so far been a waste of time and money, but it did have a certain grandeur. In Juno, Britain has achieved the rare feat of making space travel pathetic. It may be the space programme we deserve.

With a whimper

There is silence as War on Want, one of the most progressive charities, disappears. Nobody wants to be quoted, but it is clear that few believe its end was inevitable. Like the disasters it fought in other parts of the world, the end of War on Want was not just an act of God.

The charity was begun in the 1950s by the young Harold Wilson and Victor Gollancz. Under Frank Harcourt-Munning it adopted a pioneering approach, seeking long-term solutions to want, rather than simply giving relief.

By the time George Galloway, Labour MP for Glasgow Hillhead, was appointed as its general secretary in 1986, it was noted as a courageous organisation—one which could afford to say things that others with more traditional constituencies couldn't. Like all charities working in this field, it received a huge boost to its finances from donations to Ethiopia through Band Aid and Live Aid. And like other charities, it knew this wouldn't last. So why is it now left with a £650,000 bank overdraft that it can't pay back?

Galloway's leadership style drove away staff with a commitment to aid work—staff who describe his regime as "political manoeuvring, purges, purges and more purges". The publicity over his sex-life and £20,000 expenses didn't help—and it seriously damaged the progressive wing of the British charity movement. What must be remembered is not the ignominious end, but the pioneering beginning.

Canterbury tales

Anglican affairs give godless hacks who couldn't tell a chalice from a chasuble the chance to mimic the narrator of a Trollope novel. No sooner has Dr Runcie announced his departure than the amateur ecclesiologists start musing in earnest. Will Liverpool drive straight to Canterbury? Can Downing Street block Birmingham? If Oxford drops out, will All-Ireland sneak up on the rails? You might even expect the *NSS* to put in a shout for Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Cape Town. We would rather leave the prelates to their own devices. State and church should separate, once and for all. To our dissenting 19th-century forebears, disestablishment was a cornerstone of radical politics. It should become so again.

As a "national church", the Church of England has dwindled into a pampered fraud. Its communicants number about 1.6 million. The Roman Catholics and the other protestant denominations can each claim half a million more active members. Participating Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews can between them equal the total of practising Anglicans. But since the indifferent millions still expect their local vicar to hatch, match and despatch them, both clergy and wayward flock have an interest in sustaining the illusion. Even left-leaning clerics tell us that disestablishment would turn the C of E into "just another sect" and muffle its voice of protest on racism or inner-city poverty. (It might also help keep John Selwyn Gummer off our TV screens during sessions of the General Synod, that ghastly parody of the Supreme Soviet on a quiet day.)

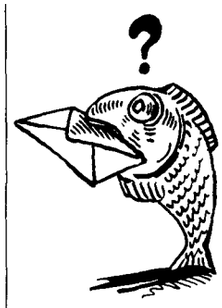
"Just another sect" is exactly what the Anglican church should be. If it seeks influence, it should merit it, not inherit it from Henry VIII's ad hoc solution to his marital disputes. David Hare's absorbing new play about Anglican priests, *Racing Demon*, rests on the premise that the wrangles of a minority faith can illuminate the nation's spiritual state. In the theatre, that assumption can still work. It has no place in a secular society made up of many creeds, and none at all.

Anarchy in the T&G

The Transport and General Workers Union was established, and for most of its history run, as an autocracy. The sheer weight of Ernie Bevin's legacy held it together. But for over 20 years that inherited coherence has been trickling away. Frank Cousins and Jack Jones tried to devolve power; but much of it left their hands to fall into the laps of warring official cliques. Moss Evans, a likeable man but no strategist, visibly lost his grip; and the tougher but also obviously less intelligent Ron Todd has never regained it. Today the TGWU is in a state of chronic chaos: no longer a dictatorship but a polyarchy with tendencies to anarchy.

The re-run executive ballot has done nothing to resolve this. It marginally strengthened the union's (so-called) left-wing faction, yet even the faction has so many sub-factions in its turn that it can't deliver stable majorities for any consistent course. Its re-elected senior figure, Walter Greendale, may aspire to be the "Godfather" the gutter press calls him; but is no more in effective charge than Todd is. As for the Kinnockite "right wing", they couldn't even get their key figure, Brian Nicholson, back on the executive. There are no big conspiracies running the TGWU, just endless cockups. Even the ballot rigging which caused the re-run, and which the police are now probing, was no big deal in itself. Whoever was responsible didn't do sufficient homework to target the really marginal seats.

Ron Todd and co. are honest in their protestations that they've never conspired to undermine Neil Kinnock. On the contrary, they have persistently shot themselves in the feet, collapsed in pain and left Neil to wander along and trip over their recumbent forms. The union needs an urgent spring-clean: or else rapid removal to an honoured but dusty place in the Museum of Labour History.



The increasingly beleaguered Kenneth Baker appears to think that the answer to the Tory party's crisis lies in a parlour game of his own devising called "52 questions". This has been running since 5 January, when he sent Neil Kinnock a list of tough questions on Labour's economic policy. Kinnock reacted with appropriate disdain, by not replying. Six days later, Baker pursued the matter, with a rousing "the British people have a right to know." This one-sided correspondence has continued ever since. In the latest installment, dated 23 March, the tenacious Baker homes in on "how you would tackle inflation (question 18)... the country demands some answers." Aware that the country doesn't seem to give a toss, Kinnock maintains his lofty silence. Question 53 must be: "is anybody there?"

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LETTERS

Habitat chic

Carl Gardner ("Disappearing Habitats", 9 March 1990) has failed to equate disappearing Queensways, Colorolls, MFIs, Magnets, Laura Ashleys etc with disappearing Habitats due to the inability of young people to move home because of the cost of their mortgages.

He is undoubtedly right, however, that Habitat is not as innovative as it used to be, but this is, I am afraid, because the public has not been seeking innovation during a decade when market forces have been reflecting Prince Charles's rather regressive aspirations.

Whilst it is quite understandable that many *New Statesman and Society* readers would prefer the radical chic of a car boot sale (I rather enjoy the idea of them myself), it is hard to think where other than Habitat they might choose to shop for home furnishings if they did want something new and fresh, well designed and reasonably priced.

Habitat may not have recently satisfied the post-Modernist yearnings of the upwardly mobile British, but it is interesting to note that Habitat has remained consistently successful in France and, from a political perspective, it is worth remembering that the fascists crushed the Bauhaus idealist spirit because its egalitarian ideas did not coincide with the neoclassic Nazi philosophy!

Terence Conran
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36 Shad Thames
London SE1

England and Englishness

I read Cairns Craig's piece on "Us and Them" with very mixed feelings (16 March). I agree with him when he criticises the ideology of Englishness as a process of "*self*-making." What perplexes me is that he should say that my book, *England and Englishness*, promotes such an ideology. Quite the contrary. I repeatedly argue that developing ideas of nationalism *can't* be separated out from what happens elsewhere. I even quote Angus Calder quoting no less a person than Cairns Craig to buttress my argument. I expect to be attacked by critics on the right for ignoring what is apparent to them, that there is an "English temperament" (it likes Royalty, order, and tradition). But when someone on the left accuses me of subscribing to the very myth I'm challenging I think I'm owed some sort of an apology.

John Lucas
Devonshire Avenue
Beeston
Nottingham

Unnecessary suffering

Sean French usually displays sound logic and good sense in his weekly columns. What happened in the issue of 16 March?

The attack on campaigners against fur and hunting seems oblivious to the wider issues involved in both these facets of animal abuse.

Campaigns have to rely on tackling, as a first step, the most obvious and the most gross of the abuses they wish to end. Animal abuse is so extensive in our society and so well glossed over by its perpetrators that emotive and sometimes simplistic methods have to be used to stand any chance of highlighting even its existence.

Fur coats are unnecessary objects causing a great deal of pain and suffering to animals. But the issues go deeper than that. Fur coats are also a symbol of haves and have nots —a flaunting of wealth and opulence, the sartorial equivalent of a Rolls Royce. In starting to remove these symbols of animal suffering, we can hopefully remove some of the associated oppression of people.

Shouting and spitting at fur-clad women may be easy. But I can't allow Sean French to get away with the accusation that campaigners against fox hunting show "simple physical cowardice." Hunt saboteurs are regularly on the receiving end of quite brutal violence.

Yes, the "dumb animals" poster displayed a misogynistic streak, but the correct concern about such tactics should not—as it does in Sean French's hands—obscure the very real message behind it.

Sean French tries to excuse fur by parcelling animal abuses into a neat sliding scale of acceptabilty defined by apparent "harmlessness". But life's not like that. Only connect, E M Forster wrote, and that message holds good for those who write off concern about the position of animals in our society. Connect our treatment of animals with our treatment of people, connect the abusers with their other roles in society, connect bad food with bad intensive farming practices, connect bad medicines with unreliable animal tests.

One day, perhaps, people might even connect up with the fact that some animal has experienced pain and suffering to provide a leather jacket.

Andrew Linington
Forest Row
East Sussex

Serious Green politics

Shortly after listening to the budget speech, I read your welcome editorial urging that green politics be taken seriously ("Can't get started" 16 March). It had obviously not been read by the Chancellor, who failed entirely to make any reference to any of the important green issues.

You are quite right when you criticise both major parties for failing to take seriously the threat of global warming. Scientists around the world are warning that we will need to halve the amount of carbon dioxide (the principal greenhouse gas) to begin to ameliorate the problem. So it is inherently depressing to realise that our politicians are still not prepared to commit themselves to modest targets, let alone introduce policies, which will even begin to stabilise such emissions.

For the rest of this year, a wide variety of international meetings concerning global warming are due to be held. At all of these, British politicians will be under pressure from both the developed and the developing world to make firm commitments on CO_2 savings. It is vital that these commitments are not only made, but stuck to. Please continue to raise this issue as often and as loudly as possible: otherwise the "light green veneer" you identify as common ground among our politicians will never grow dark enough.

Andrew Warren
Association for the Conservation of Energy
9 Sherlock Mews
London W1

Fair-minded criticism

Having read Aziz Al-Azmeh's attack ("Bogus leaders", 9 March) on David Caute ("Prophet motive", 16 February), I can now see the difference between a fair-minded writer and a prejudiced bigot. Aziz Al-Azmeh is a Syrian *Christian* who teaches Islamic studies at Exeter Unviersity. His prejudices are not surprising, once one knows his background.

David Caute is one of the few non-Muslim writers who has written on the Rushdie affair, with sympathy and understanding. His reviews of Malise Ruthven's *A Satanic Affair* and Shabbir Akhtar's *Be Careful With Muhammad*, are fair-minded. The same cannot be said of Aziz Al-Azmeh's piece.

Mohammed Siddique
President
The Muslim Youth Movement of Great Britain
Southfield Square
Bradford

Aids education

In his review of *Ecstatic Antibodies* ("Moments of vision", 16 March) Joseph Bristow spends much time criticising the Health Education Authority for Aids campaigns run before the Authority even existed. The Department of Health undertook all the work, including the "Don't Die of Ignorance" campaign, before October 1987 when responsibility for Aids public education was handed to the newly formed HEA.

Susan Perl
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Honourable victory

By claiming ("Honourable defeat", 16 March) that the outcome of the ambulance workers' dispute was a "fashionable moral victory no different from defeat" the *New Statesman and Society* crossed the line from healthy scepticism into outright cynicism.

The ambulance unions improved their negotiating position significantly, enhanced their reputation and undermined the government. By no stretch of the imagination could this be described as a defeat. To state otherwise distorts equally the facts of the case, and any sensible meaning normally ascribed to the notion of defeat.

More disturbingly by suggesting that there is no difference between the settlement achieved by the ambulance workers and defeat, the *NSS* implies that had the dispute been conducted less skillfully then the outcome would have been unchanged. In fact, at every twist and turn of the dispute the government set out to undermine the unions, weaken their position, and set back their cause. Ten years ago they might have succeeded. Today they failed, primarily because of the political and presentational skills of the unions and their representatives.

The *NSS* may not recognise the difference between the result of the dispute and defeat, but the government does. They were out to wound the unions and failed. The unions made progress in difficult circumstances. We should learn from our successes and build on them, not deride them.

Philip Gould
Old Compton Street
London W1

Editor's note: Our note, headed "Honourable defeat", was a last comment in a series of reports, all of which were supportive of the ambulance workers and their unions. Philip Gould seems not to have read these, nor even all of the short note which he writes about. That note paid tribute to "Roger Poole's undeniable PR skills" and the "massive public support" which the unions' refusal to go on all-out strike won; and mentioned also the contribution which the ambulance workers had made to the government's unpopularity. But the ambulance workers failed to gain their major demand—for a new pay mechanism—or much more (just 2.5 per cent) above the original offer. Our point was simply that public opinion cannot win an action in which workers are limiting the damage it does if the government isn't receptive (as this mid-term government with an anti-inflation policy, wasn't) while an old-fashioned "sod the public" action can still succeed. We weren't being at all critical of the ambulance workers or their unions' strategy.

THIS ENGLAND

£5 book tokens for entries printed. (Postcards please)

● Mr Justice Rougier recommended that Victor Castigador serve at least 25 years. He told him: "I find it almost impossible to understand the workings of a mind as twisted and evil as yours. You have forfeited the right to walk free amongst decent men and women for a long time." As he was led to the cells, Castigador said: "That's fair enough."—*Guardian*
(Tim Beecham)

● A judge in Surrey yesterday advised a young defendant to "go back up north", telling him: "You're a Scot and you don't speak English."—*Times* (Amanda Welles)

● Squadron Leader John Findlay, the 73-year-old Tory chairman of the district council is "very cross" about the change in style of Surrey politics.

"In the past, politics was hardly ever mentioned. Now it's all becoming very political.

"I had no political reason for joining the Conservatives. I happened to be invited; if the Independents had asked, I would have stood for them.

"There is no need for the party aspects. It is mainly a rural area and people do not have time for silly arguments."—*Guardian*
(Ronald Gray)

● The gallows is now owned by PC Terry Lambley who hopes to raise at least £5,000 at the auction. PC Lambley said: "I would not sell it but my wife will not have it in the garden any longer."

He loaned the gallows to Louis Tussauds waxworks museum in Blackpool but "unfortunately the museum decided not to keep it. They replaced it with a waxwork of Barry Manilow."—*Daily Telegraph*
(Janey Buchan)

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DIARY

Sean French

It has become a hoary cliché (and it is, *incidentally*, somehow satisfying that the phrase "hoary cliché" is now itself a hoary cliché) that nasty characters on TV become popular. The examples generally cited are Johnny Speight's Alf Garnett and Harry Enfield's Loadsamoney who were both loved by the people they were designed to expose.

Phillip Whitehead must have felt reasonably safe when producing his series about Stalin, but it now seems that even massmurdering tyrants can provoke affection in some viewers. I here reproduce the entire response to the programme last week by Garry Bushell, television critic of the *Sun*: "It must be true what they say about nobody being all bad... EVEN STALIN banned poofs!"

Arguing with this is a bit like trying to wipe a message off the wall of a public lavatory with your tongue, but I am curious as to what limits the editor of the *Sun* would impose on this sort of commentary. Would I be permitted to congratulate Hitler on having "banned" Jews or Gypsies?

Bushell's use of language is commendably precise. In modern Britain the homosexual *act*, not the homosexuality, was illegal. Stalin and Hitler acted against whole categories of people. Paul Johnson wrote well on this in his *History of the Jews*. He observed that Jews had grown sadly accustomed through history to buying off their persecutors, compromising with them, negotiating with them, often at ruinous cost. But in the Nazis they faced something entirely different: opponents whose only demand was that they cease to exist.

The anti-homosexual proselytising of writers like Roger Scruton may be offensive, but at least they are only calling on homosexuals to refrain from homosexual acts. Stalin wanted them to be eliminated altogether.

You can occasionally hear support for genocide on my local football terraces at Highbury (where the Arsenal supporters sing an anti-Spurs song that begins, "I never felt more like gassing the Jews" to the tune of "I never felt more like singing the blues"), but I have never read it in a national newspaper before. There goes another taboo.

I travel by train almost as rarely as Margaret Thatcher but this week necessity compelled me to visit Bath on a 125 and I was startled by how much the service has been permeated by the new commercial culture.

I have been somewhat diffident about asking after late trains ever since a London Transport employee told me to fuck off in response to one such query a couple of years ago.

But it was obvious during this week's journey that a public relations consultant had been at work. The train was ten minutes late, well within the margin of error, I would have thought, but the guard "sincerely apologised", and not just once but before and after every station en route.

This fulsome repetition was made even more irritating by the new practice of referring to us as customers. We used to be passengers but clearly that word now has unpleasant associations with archaic notions of service, duty and responsibility. It could make us forget that rail travel, like water and road mending, is actually a product to be paid for like a carton of milk.

British Rail have maintained some of their traditional low standards, however. I've been told that smell is connected more directly to the memory area of the brain than any other of the senses.

Certainly one of my olfactory traumas has long been the appalling reek that fills a 125 whenever the brakes are applied. In his first novel, *Brilliant Creatures*, Clive James describes this as a urethral odour, which makes me think that he ought urgently to have his urethra examined because there must be something very wrong up there.

There was a recent correspondence on the subject on the *Guardian*'s Notes and Queries page in which I learned that the exterior air-conditioning duct on 125 trains was placed directly next to the brake mechanism, one of those things that only an expert could design.

But a British Rail spokesperson wrote in to say that the fumes are safe, so that must be OK.

Getting out of town provided a series of shocks this week. Continued numbed exposure to London had made me forget what an odd place the countryside is, full of things that I don't know anything about. My companion could recognise, or claimed she could recognise, a hawthorn bush but I don't know the name of any plant that hasn't got a label attached to it.

This ignorance, incidentally, severely disables me as a reader of classic fiction. Whenever I read anything more recondite than Wordsworth's daffodils, a passage in a classic novel describing something like the larches silhouetted against the sky, or the scent of eglantine wafting through the hollyhocks, my mind's eye turns a shade of grey.

I saw a skyful of stars for the first time for many years and was reminded that I can only make out one constellation, the plough, so-called, clearly, because it looks nothing like a plough.

Lastly, the person who invented the term "dawn chorus" must have been a city dweller, or deaf. The reality sounds like a torturer's open day in an aviary.

I usually hate being ill but gradually losing my voice over the last week has been an oddly pleasurable experience. I've always disliked the timbre of my normal speaking voice (I've always assumed that everyone dislikes the sound of their own voice, with the possible exception of James Mason). So it was something of a treat to sound like Charles Bronson on the first day, Tom Waits on the second and Lee Marvin on the third, even though I was left with nothing recognisably human by the fourth.

I got so excited by this that I changed my answering machine messsage. Unfortunately I had left it too late and the croaking, wheezing result sounds like the sort of tape that a serial killer might send into a tabloid newspaper in order to boast about his crimes.

Now I can manage nothing more than a whisper but even that has its charms. I've discovered the odd phenomenon that when you whisper to people they find it difficult to reply in a normal speaking voice. Instead they speak in a sort of empathetic croak, as if one were to adopt an imitative limp when encountering Douglas Bader.

It is an excellent means of provoking social discomfiture which I shall keep in reserve.

I'm now off to prepare for the *NSS* appearance in the final of the radio quiz show, *The Year in Question*. If anyone hears what sounds like the *NSS* pet parrot croaking in the background, it'll be me.

ROGER WODDIS

Tipping the scales

Granada Television broadcast this week a programme on the Birmingham pub bombings

Our native urge to see fair play
Makes Britain what she is today:
Although the flag of truth stays furled,
We are the wonder of the world.

Long after horror, everyone
Still mourns the murdered 21.
We may, sir, have misjudged the Six,
But after all, that's politics.

Let no one vilify Lord Lane,
Or in their innocence complain
That treatment meted out was rough.
These men are Irish. That's enough.

The Lord Chief Justice, bless his wig,
Thinks being wrong is *infra dig*
And slumbers peacefully at night
To know the law is always right.

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MILDMAY

AIDS HOSPICE AND CONTINUING CARE UNIT

– THE FIRST IN EUROPE –

We've cared for them all

Wife
Husband
Brother
Sister
Son
Daughter
Auntie
Uncle
Nephew
Niece
Cousin
Grandmother
Grandfather

(And each one is somebody's friend)

When AIDS is a family affair, how can you not be affected?

To the original AIDS hospice at Mildmay we have just added a continuing care unit, plus day centre and home care support for all members of the family - in response to widespread need.

★ It costs us £150/ day to care for a patient with AIDS ★
The specialist care is expensive, but we make no charges whatsoever to our patients.
As an independent charity we rely heavily on voluntary donations.

If AIDS wasn't such a serious problem in today's society, there wouldn't be the need to have this appeal. Please be generous in your response.

The cost of this advertisment was anonymously donated.

I wish to make a positive response to Mildmay's Aids Appeal
BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

SURNAME.....FIRST NAME.....TITLE.....

ADDRESS.....

.....POST CODE.....

Please accept my donation of £5 ☐ £10 ☐ £50 ☐ £100 ☐ £150 ☐

Other ☐ £.....by cheque ☐ (made payable to Mildmay Mission Hospital) or by credit card ☐ and send me a free information pack. I authorise you to debit my Access ☐ Visa ☐ for the amount specified above.

My card no. is ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Expiry date..... Signature.....

AIDS APPEAL, Mildmay Mission Hospital, Freepost, London E2 7BR

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Blood from a stone

After Mid-Staffs, can Labour win in New England? Maria Manning visited Stevenage and found fear and loathing of Mrs Thatcher

Sylvia Heal's Mid-Staffs by-election victory confirms a significant new electoral trend: the skilled workers—or C2s in pollsters' language—who defected to the Conservatives in 1979, are now voting Labour again. The Harris exit poll, which was very accurate, showed that Labour had a 36 per cent lead over the Tories among this crucial voting group.

But how far can Labour count on their votes in those key New England seats—the Harlows, Basildons, Swindons, Lutons—which they must win if they are to become a truly national party once more? Stevenage is New England, purpose-built and rigorously functional. Legoland structures in primary colours have been tagged onto the concrete-and-glass architecture of the 1960s and 1970s. I visited the town on the day of Labour's triumph in Mid-Staffs, to fill out the psephology with people.

From the station a walkway skirts the massive leisure centre. Through a window at roof level you can look down on the dignified choreography of a bowls game. Smiling senior citizens amble to and fro across the synthetic pitch under the banner "Sport For All". There is an obsession with leisure here—it is a worker's town and leisure is the corollary of work. But it is a particular type of leisure on offer, sports-oriented, organised, *wholesome* leisure. Everyone looks very clean and conventional. On a mid-week market day the town centre is occupied by an orderly regiment of women shopping, all dressed in department store clothes, and out to buy more of the same. Trim, tidy women in court shoes and polyester macs.

In Stevenage, the high proportion of skilled manual and white-collar workers—C2s and C1s—straddles the old two-class model of society, just as the town itself breaches the older division between town and country. Sprawling eastward now, new developments continue to encroach on rural Hertfordshire, but the suburbs are green and spacious and patches of trees, otherwise known as "amenity woodlands", jut up against the back gardens of "mixed development" housing estates. Stevenage, the first new town, was born without a history out of the 1946 Master Plan and the 1966 Revised Master Plan.

I met Jean in a cafe next to the Tesco superstore. She was one of the first pioneers who uprooted themselves from old established communities, drawn by the prospects of homes and jobs. She and her husband, Jim, came here in 1961 from Barking. Jim walked straight into an engineering job at British Aerospace, the largest employer in Stevenage. A council house came as part of the package. Skills were at a premium, and it was young skilled workers who were the most mobile, ambitious for themselves and their children. "It was like emigrating to Australia, you had to prove you would be useful before they'd let you come," she says.

They bought their council house in 1971, and although they both work, the repayments have been a strain. With a daughter of 21, their three adult household will be liable for a poll tax bill of £1,305. Jean, an ex-Labour voter, voted for the SDP (or rather, for Shirley Williams) in 1987, but now she thinks that would be a wasted vote. With the collapse of the centre parties and the need for change so urgent now, she intends to vote Labour at the next election. But angry as she is about the poll tax, it is the deterioration of the NHS which best sums up the the impact of Thatcherism for her.

Like others I was to meet that day, she had her own personal NHS horror story. Jean's daughter was treated for three years for a painful jaw joint at the local hospital. The removal of her wisdom teeth, three types of brace on her teeth, courses of steroids, all failed to have any effect. Eventually a fracture was discovered and two days later a bed became available at University College Hospital, London, more than 30 miles away. She was admitted, had her head shaved and was given a pre-med injection, then sent home because there was no room on the operating schedule.

Simple Labour or Thatcherite labels can't adequately capture people like Jean. They can, and do, talk in conventional political terms, but with the physical wrench of moving came new aspirations and changes in political affiliations. They had space to re-think their old ties. They were making their way under their own steam, by hard work and plenty of overtime and had earned the right to form their own opinions. They could exploit their own bargaining power in the labour market and could therefore do without unions which had ceased to feel relevant. Jim was a member of ASTMS, but let his membership lapse, not because trade unions were "too militant", but as Jean says, "because they didn't do enough for the working class". But when, in 1979, they made the break from Labour they didn't simply join up under another label, Owenite or Thatcherite. It was their blow for independence, their claim to distinctiveness. They don't see themselves as flat-capped workers, but they don't see themselves as members of a new middle class either. They live outside the neat categories into which pollsters and politicians want them to fit.

Many of them liked and trusted Shirley Williams personally, and voted for the SDP candidate in 1983 and 1987 for that reason, pushing Labour down to third place. But in local elections Stevenage has consistently returned a solid Labour council. On the same day that

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Peter Schrank

Williams was defeated there in 1979, all bar one of the wards (Old Stevenage) were won by Labour in local elections. Brian Hall, leader of the council, has been searching for the "funny factor" which creates this perception of Labour as fit only for local government. He believes it may historically have been a nervousness among British Aerospace workers about Labour's unilateralist stance and defence policy in general, now assuaged

Of course, those who did vote for Mrs Thatcher also wanted a higher standard of living—or, as the dogmatic left saw it, they were bought off by materialism. A comfortably-off left intelligentsia—middle-class home owners with two cars, consumer durables and summers in Tuscany—accused the C2s of political betrayal, despised them for wanting what they had, and mocked the lavishly furnished new doors they added to their newly bought council houses. Home ownership came to define their support for the Conservative Party, but it was a symbol of much more—of security, of respect, of belonging to a new property-owning democracy. They denied that Labour had any natural right to their vote just because they were workers: they voted for their own interests, not out of class loyalty. But then they formed no new loyalty either.

A mild woman gave me a ring doughnut and said, 'I'd like to put a gun up her dress and shoot her'

More than ten years on, many of the people I spoke to denied ever voting Conservative. I found a strong distrust of all party politics. Remarks like "they all feather their own nests", "they're all as bad as each other", "they're all out for themselves" were common. Of those who did admit to voting Tory in the past, there was a new contempt for the Prime Minister. She was called a dictator, a leech, an uncaring bitch. Several people expressed the desire to do her physical damage—kicking Mrs T up the backside is a popular fantasy.

On the east side of town the suburb of Chells is being gradually extended. The road through a small, private estate ends in mounds of raw orange bricks and the foundations of new houses have been left to settle. I went door to door, collecting political clichés. A mild-mannered clerical worker invited me in and offered me a ring doughnut. While she stirred her tea, she said laughing: "I'd like to put a gun up Mrs Thatcher's dress and shoot her." In the same road an old man in his socks said: "Now write this down... (he went to turn the television down)... if I was man enough, I'd shoot Mrs Thatcher."

Both were ex-Labour voters who had turned to Mrs Thatcher and were, as the clerical worker said, "desperately put off now". It was clear that the Prime Minister has stepped over an invisible line. In the wake of the economic turbulence and corporatist debacle of the 1970s, they wanted a strong, no-nonsense leader who would stand up to the unions and others. But the tide has turned. Now people here resent her hectoring tone, her cavalier ways of running the country, her unwillingness to listen. "She's definitely gone too far", "I hate her", "She just doesn't listen, that's her trouble", these were the views I heard everywhere; it came as a surprise when a middle-aged man who'd taken two days off to redecorate his bathroom, said: "I've never been so well-off, I like Thatcher—in 200 years' time, she'll be remembered in history."

What's remarkable is how much the resentment is personally focused on Mrs Thatcher and her style of governing, and not on her policies. The poll tax has been set here at £435, one of the highest in the country, and yet it is not usually the first thing people mention. The state of the NHS incites most outrage: Jean's was commonplace. She had been in hospital twice in the past year, and was angry at the shortage of beds and equipment, and sympathised with the disillusionment and frustration of overworked nursing staff: "I wanted to drag Kenneth Clarke down there by the scruff of his neck and rub his nose in it."

But this concern about the NHS reflects a much wider concern about the erosion of the public sphere. People express compassion for those who aren't as well off as themselves. "The poll tax is the same as the rates for me, but it's too hard on the young ones trying to buy a home," said an old woman half-hidden by her chained door. Behind this compassion, however, I felt a sense of people's own feelings of vulnerability. Quite a few talked of their own fears—of redundancy, of repossession, of being unable to pay for private medicine. "People can't pay and pay," an old woman said. "In the end it's like trying to get blood out of a stone." ●

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The beast awakes

With its corrupting myths of race, identity and tradition, nationalism has again reared its ugly head—from Lithuania to Afghanistan. It must be challenged by a new internationalism in which both cultural diversity and democracy can flourish, argues Fred Halliday

Chris Price

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Across much of the contemporary world, we are witnessing a supposedly welcome revival of nationalism. Nationalism, it is said, is the driving force behind the new political movements in eastern Europe, responsible as much for the unification of Germany as for the threatened break-up of the USSR. Flags, languages, symbols, grievances long suppressed or supposedly forgotten have now been revived. Placenames are being changed, to what they were "before". Religions associated with national "identity" are on the advance. Enthusiasts of many hues are producing maps of their "national" territory.

There are two welcome aspects of this process. First, what we are seeing in eastern Europe and the USSR is the development of democracy, the increased freedom of peoples long denied it. Because nationalism asserts the rights of distinct peoples to independence, it plays an important role in democratic politics.

The changes in eastern Europe are also reasserting a cultural diversity, in language, writing, popular music, that draws on the richness of inheritances amongst these peoples. Insofar as "internationalism", imposed by the USSR, denied these two things, the world is well rid of it. But to welcome greater democracy and self-determination, and the extension of cultural diversity, is not to welcome nationalism itself. Nationalism may well incorporate such positive forces, but it is not identical with them and is itself beset with myths and dangers.

For all that they stress their uniqueness and special character, nationalisms are in many respects all the same, and rest on three recurrent ideas, each of which is unfounded. The first is that nations have existed for a long time. Peoples, cultures, communities, with varying degrees of continuity and homogeneity, have existed for centuries and more. But nations, in the sense of communities with some common features espousing the right to self-rule, are all less than 200 years old. It is only since 1789 that the values and ideology of "nationalism" have become part of political life. The term "nation" came into political parlance in the French revolution, to signify the community of citizens and was first used in its present meaning in English in 1844. Nations are groups of people who at some time in the 19th or 20th centuries decided to call themselves such.

The second myth of nations is that in some way they correspond to something real—to a history, a tradition, a common race, language, territory, fate and, in some cases, a divine order. All this is nonsense. Counting newly independent Namibia there are now 170 sovereign entities in the world, which we dignify with the term "nation-state". States they are, but there is nothing "given", by history, God or anything else, that makes this map accord with the diversity of peoples in the world. Language, the first try of anyone trying to define a nation, defines very few—not just in the third world, but in many parts of Europe too, not least Switzerland and Belgium. There are over 4,000 languages in the world. Perhaps there should be 4,000 states?

"Race", the other stock resort, is a dangerous concept at best: even if it were not, it would not get very far with most of the nations in the world. None of the societies created since the year 1500 make much sense in terms of race. The United States, Australia, Brazil and dozens of others actually represent a vigorous mingling of races. Even in more settled continents, the dividing lines of the contemporary international system fell haphazardly, with little respect for existing communities and divisions.

The third myth of the nation is that in some way we all "belong" to one. "Belonging", like the term "community", can contain many a false answer. Many people in the world have more than one national identity. My father was a Yorkshire Quaker, my mother an Irish Catholic. Having lived in England and Ireland, I find much in each that I like, and feel a refreshing degree of non-belonging in both.

In many "nation-states" of the world, the official nationalism is that of one dominant group using its supposed legitimacy to promote the subordination of others. It is conventional to say that this is true of "third world states", but it is equally true of the United Kingdom, a multinational state forged by conquest and long maintained by force. The importance of nationalism for control is true not only for the issues explicitly covered by nationalism, but also for other forms of control, on lines of class and gender.

But even for people who qualify, the idea of "belonging" is equally bogus. For what is the entity to which they are supposed to belong? How is its "identity" defined? Here the ready answers of nationalism draw upon "tradition" in one form or another, as if what consititutes the nation is handed down by earlier generations. This is an absurdity. Tradition is an artefact, a selective collection of myths and inventions made for contemporary purposes; and what constitutes tradition is defined by those with power.

My father was a Yorkshire Quaker, my mother an Irish Catholic. I find much in each country I like.

It is these myths that underlie all nationalisms. In themselves they might be seen as innocuous, necessary for identity and a sense of security in the modern age. Yet, once accepted they provide a basis for domination towards those within the community who dissent and of arrogance or worse towards those seen as "foreign" or alien.

Discussion of chauvinistic nationalism usually focuses on the Nazis, but there is plenty of it in the world today. In Britain, we have racism, football violence which takes to the continent, and a patriotic pride which justifies a military expedition to re-take a few islands thousands of miles away.

In the US, a newly confident nationalism has a hard edge of militaristic arrogance, as in the invasion of Panama, and in the great power conceit of caring little about what happens elsewhere. In Germany, Helmut Kohl is the embodiment of his country's rediscovery of "nationalist arrogance": in 1985, staging a ceremony in the Bitburg cemetery where SS men lie buried; and in 1990, equivocating on the Oder-Neisse frontier with Poland. Japan's nationalism has taken an equally ugly form in recent years, as its leaders preach cultural superiority at home and promote economic domination abroad. One of the consequences of *glasnost* has been the resurgence of Russian nationalism, incited by the bearded patriarchs of the Orthodox church.

The dangers of nationalism are not confined to oppressor states. Other peoples, including those currently or recently oppressed or dominated on national and ethnic grounds, may well reply in kind, and often against other oppressed peoples. The revival of nationalism in Europe today and, in particular, of ethnic divisions in eastern Europe, has been preceded by a wave of communalism and ethnic conflict in the third world: in Lebanon, Punjab, Assam, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, to name but some.

Once these conflicts develop, they are very difficult to resolve, as one can see in the three most prominent cases in the developed west: Ireland, the Basque country, and Quebec. In all three, the violence has been "contained", but no political solution has been found. If this is so where conditions are favourable—political democracy, relatively high economic standards—the difficulties are all the greater where one or both of these do not apply. That the current upheavals in the USSR and eastern Europe will unleash their own crop of ethnic and communal conflicts is already evident in the Caucasus, in Kosovo, Bulgaria, Romania, Transylvania; as well as in the rise of anti-semitism in Russia and Poland.

The socialist movement has long sought to grapple with nationalism and has remained discomfited by it. The internationalism of the left has contained its own illusions: a naive belief in the ability of economic interaction to produce a wider sense of political community; an exaggerated sense of what solidarity can achieve; and, in the case of the communist parties, a debasement of internationalism to mean unconditional loyalty to the USSR. But in reaction against these illusions, the very idea of internationalism has too easily been abandoned. Internationalism is relevant in the contemporary world above all in two respects: the rejection of nationalist myths themselves, whether these be the myths of "others" or of one's "own" people; and support for democratic and humane forms of international cooperation in the face of international trends that are neither.

The left has often had a comparatively healthy disdain towards the national myths of dominant nations, even if, in the name of a newfound populism, this has been eroded in the 1970s and 1980s. In the name of "solidarity", people have been too reluctant to criticise the myths of the nationalist movements of oppressed peoples, even when the latter are legitimate insofar as they express democratic aspirations to self-rule.

The Arab-Israeli question has prompted both forms of indulgence, towards oppressors and oppressed. Identification with Israel through-

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out the 1950s and early 1960s led most European socialists to deny the rights of the Palestinians to their own state; support for the Palestinians in the 1970s and 1980s led to the equally spurious refusal to accept the right of the Israelis to their state.

The 1980s provided two litmus tests of an internationalist approach: Ireland and Afghanistan. On the former, much of the British left went along with the myths of Catholic nationalism, favouring a united Ireland over the right of the Protestant community in the north to a democratic decision on its future; on the latter, hostility to the USSR's role in Afghanistan led to indulgence of the *mujahidin*, many of them representative of the most viciously anti-democratic ideas.

But true internationalists must question the terms on which the world is being internationalised today. Contemporary internationalisation is not a simple process: it is two-sided, in that the growth of new forms of interaction in economics, politics, culture, communications, is accompanied by an effloresence of particularisms and a fragmentation between and within states. This is the refreshing message of Hans-Magnus Enzensberger's *Europe, Europe*, which contrasts the growth of a supra-natural EC with the vibrancy of separate cultures and histories within individual states. And while states are becoming more involved with each other, as in the EC, they are also increasing their powers in other respects—control of migration being an obvious case.

But insofar as the world is being more internationalised a question arises: on whose terms is this taking place? We can see in the realm of media culture a growing concentration of power at the international level, as in certain parts of economic interaction. The release of eastern Europe from Soviet internationalism may be replaced by the less overt, but equally tenacious, international controls of West German capital. The questions that arise with regard to both nationalism and internationalism are the same: how far do they lead to greater or lesser democracy, and how far do they promote or preclude cultural diversity? On their own, both can be instruments of control, by social classes, states, genders, dominant ethnic groups.

It is for this reason that those who do challenge nationalist myths, in the name of a democratic internationalism, are worthy of a special respect. The list of such figures is a long one and could include, among many others, Flora Tristan, Rosa Luxemburg, Isaac Deutscher, Maxime Rodinson, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Edward Said, Tom Nairn. Many of the best such critics, rooted in a specific culture but able to reach beyond it, have been writers—from Erich Maria Remarque and James Joyce to Graham Greene and Joseph Brodsky.

It is most apt that, in recent weeks, the name of another writer, now president of his country, has been added to that list, namely Vaclav Havel, who has condemned the treatment of Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia at the end of World War II and drawn attention to the multinational character of his own country. His challenge to the nationalist myths of his own, long-suffering, people, amidst the revival of eastern European animosities, is the mark of a special, internationalist, courage. ●

Token gestures

Glenda Jackson, Labour's newest woman candidate, gets star treatment. But equally able women don't make it through the labyrinth. Kirsty Milne reports

There was an unofficial rose in Sylvia Heal's by-election bouquet. She arrived on Tuesday to take her seat in the House of Commons as Labour's 23rd woman MP, inching the proportion of women in the parliamentary Labour Party up to the 10 per cent mark.

On the same day, Glenda Jackson, actress and Charter 88 signatory, was chosen from an all-women shortlist to fight the Conservative marginal of Hampstead and Highgate at the next election.

The magistrate and the actress are conferring unearned respectability on their party, but if they sweep into Westminster together after the next election, it will not be in a greatly increased company of women MPs. On present showing, it does not even look as if Labour is going to beat its 1987 record of 93 women parliamentary candidates.

Some constituency parties have been determined to choose a woman candidate: Dulwich last week selected Tessa Jowell, a director of social policy research, to challenge a Conservative majority of 180 votes. But apart from existing women MPs, constituency Labour Parties have chosen 25 women in the 95 selections which have been approved so far. Only two of these are standing in the 15 safe Labour seats which have been vacated by sitting MPs.

Better results were expected from a new rule which says that if a woman has been nominated as a candidate in a constituency, there must be a woman on the final shortlist—a change long campaigned for by an internal pressure group, the Women's Action Committee.

But the new rule is doing little to improve the party's poor record, especially in Scotland, where Maria Fyfe is the only woman among 49 Labour MPs, and where just two other female candidates stood at the last general election. Capable women from both left and right are doing equally badly in the current round of selections north of the border. Dick Douglas's safe seat of Dumfermline West will be fought by Rachael Squire, a NUPE official, and Stirling may throw up a woman candidate to challenge the feather-light majority of Michael Forsyth, the Scottish Conservative Party chairman. But otherwise the prospects for returning more women Labour MPs are bleak.

To prevent this dismal scenario extending to the end of the century, Labour's National Executive Committee is canvassing various options for reform among constituency parties. They include introducing a retirement age for Labour MPs, adopting women candidates for by-elections, and making it easier for constituency Labour Parties to adopt all-women shortlists.

The only measure which would make a real difference—introducing quotas for women in safe and winnable seats—isn't even on the list of options put out by the NEC's Women's Committee, though last year's Labour Party conference asked the executive to consider the idea. Continental parties, like the German SDP, have introduced quotas, but they are easy to impose as the West German electoral system requires parties to put forward a national list of candidates, as well as candidates chosen at constituency level. To introduce quotas here, the national party would have to interfere with the autonomy of constituency parties by ordering women-only short lists in certain seats.

How refreshing to have an all-woman shortlist. Proof—if proof were needed—that we can make decisions as well as make the tea
Glenda Jackson

Picking a candidate is one of the few decisions left to local parties—and those who are in effect choosing future MPs would obviously resent losing that role. So the party is entertaining the less coercive notion of a target number of women MPs, to be achieved by the end of the century.

Perhaps the most radical of the new proposals is that trade unions—which sponsor MPs and parliamentary candidates—should be required to increase the proportion of women on their sponsorship lists to 40 per cent. At the

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moment there are 31 women on the "A" list of 150 union-sponsored candidates.

The powerful GMB union, responding to exhortation from Walworth Road, has already moved to a 40 per cent quota on its parliamentary panel, and is sponsoring 16 women candidates or would-be candidates. However, when a safe seat came up in Hartlepool, the union threw its weight behind Labour's communications director, Peter Mandelson.

Women who want to stand for parliament might find it easier to get selected if the party gets rid of the union weighting in the selection procedure, as the NEC proposed this week. A working life interrupted by bringing up children makes a long-standing association with a trade union less likely for a woman. And some unions with big female memberships, like the National Union of Teachers, are not even affiliated to the Labour party—though there are others which are, like the two public service unions, NUPE and COHSE.

Constituencies also like to see a track record of service inside the party itself, or on the local council, as well a background of trade union activity. A woman who has been bringing up a family is going to have trouble amassing the qualifying CV. Moreover, she may prefer not to make the party the focus of her political work. When Mary Kaldor put her name forward, local activists demanded: "What's she ever done for the party?"—disregarding her work in the peace movement.

Then there are the intense demands of doing the rounds as a potential candidate: trailing around the country chasing up possible seats, telephoning local secretaries, making contacts in a likely constituency party, taking on speaking engagements to get yourself known.

It was to negotiate this kind of labyrinth that a group of ex-candidates founded Labour Women's Network. One of them, Barbara Follett, who came a close second in Dulwich on Friday, resolved after the 1987 election that "women needed to start networking and making the contacts that men make to get seats".

Labour Women's Network operates as an information exchange, sending constituencies a list of women willing to stand and supplying women subscribers with details of which constituencies are selecting and when. Members have written a guide to the selection process; they organise training in public speaking and offer informal hand-holding for women about to face a nomination meeting.

Inevitably, women end up competing for the same seats. Jean Corston, the candidate for Bristol East, finds it disturbing when friends wonder whether they should stand against another woman or give her a clear run. "We women can't become a female selectorate of our own, we can't put gender before everything else. If I stand against another woman, that's democracy. It doesn't mean I'm not a feminist."

By the same token, the reasons why women are not standing extend beyond a sense of inadequacy or sisterly restraint. Political differences are always going to take precedence; being a woman did nothing to further the career of Martha Osamor, the black candidate who was replaced by Kate Hoey in the Vauxhall by-election.

Even if you pass the political litmus test,

LABOUR'S LOST MPs

PATRICIA HEWITT

Deputy director of the Institute for Public Policy Research; formerly Neil Kinnock's press and broadcasting secretary. She began trying for a Labour seat in the late 1970s—"looking for a seat takes an enormous amount of time, and money, too, if you're travelling a lot".

She was finally chosen to fight Leicester East for Labour in the 1983 elections. "I was planning to have a child after the election—looking back I don't know how I imagined I was going to cope if Labour had won the seat."

At the time she was general secretary of the National Council of Civil Liberties and driving up from London to Leicester two evenings a week. "Even without children, I was leading such a pressured life—and my partner was doing the same as a Labour councillor—that it did put a strain on our relationship."

She took a conscious decision not to look for a seat this time round. "I've got two small children and I don't want to lead that kind of life."

MARY KALDOR

Senior research fellow at the Science Policy Research Unit of Sussex University, a founder member of END and former foreign policy adviser to Labour. She was shortlisted for Hackney and Dulwich in 1981, and remembers "masses of meetings, many of which were boring, and endlessly having to be nice to people".

Her youngest child was two years old at the time. "I was very well-equipped with baby minders and a nice understanding husband, but what on earth is the point of having children if you're not going to see them?"

She was ambivalent about the idea of becoming an MP; the whole process seemed to her "entirely about competitiveness and being in the limelight, giving you no time to think honestly about your political views". She was too ill with hepatitis to go to Hackney's final selection meeting; in retrospect, she is not sorry. "Building links with eastern Europe through the peace movement was more exciting than anything I could ever have done as an MP."

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MARGARET HODGE

Leader of Islington council. Constantly cited as someone who would have made a fine Labour MP, she has not been short of invitations from constituencies asking her to stand. "It's been a hard decision; the next logical step is from local to national politics and I would love to be part of a Labour government influencing change. But it's simply inconsistent with family life, and I have four children who mean a lot to me.

"It does make me angry that the only way up the political ladder is to work at it 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That's not just inappropriate for a woman who has to look after children or relatives, it's inappropriate for any normal person.

"The way Parliament functions doesn't attract me very much. MPs can seem terribly self-obsessed, more interested in their latest media appearance than in creating change."

TESSA BLACKSTONE

Labour life peer, Master of Birkbeck College, London and the chair of the new Labour-inclined Institute for Public Policy Research. She was looking for a seat in the late 1970s, but in her own constituency—the safe Labour seat of Hackney North—she failed to make the shortlist.

She was finally shortlisted for Stevenage in 1981, but lost to another woman candidate, Sue Reeves, in a closely fought contest ("to have two women fighting it out was very rare at the time").

She now feels she saved herself "a lot of time and effort and energy" since Labour did very badly in Stevenage at the 1983 election. Shortly afterwards she was offered a job with the Inner London Education Authority which made it impossible for her to stand.

She believes it has become much easier for women to get selected. "But generally speaking, I wish constituency parties would think more about the needs of national politics and less about local interests—not just who can handle the local welfare cases, but who has the potential to be a good minister."

there is the prospect, common to all candidates, of exhaustion and exposure in an election campaign. A bright and thoughtful woman who has not made up her mind whether to stand confessed she did not like the idea "of being taken apart like Deidre Wood"—the Labour candidate who lost to Rosie Barnes in the 1987 Greenwich by-election.

An ex-candidate who responded to a Labour Women's Network survey wrote of her experience in the last election: "I came third in a safe Tory seat and frankly, I have got better things to do. The campaign took complete dedication, time and money, while the stress and anxiety diminished my private life."

The House of Commons itself could not be a more effective deterrent, with working patterns designed for 19th century lawyers who detested going home. Patricia Hewitt says that talented women who might consider standing for parliament take one look at the hours and think again. "We have got to make being an MP more normal."

Those women MPs who defy the abnormality of Westminster life evidently inspire other women. Would-be candidates often say that the presence in the parliamentary Labour party of MPs with young children—like Harriet Harman and Ann Taylor—has encouraged them to try for a seat.

But unless Labour leads a cross-party campaign to push for reforms, like fixed term sessions and easier working hours, Westminster life will continue to exact unreasonable sacrifices from any MP, male or female, who combines parliamentary and constituency responsibilities with a young family. Labour's women MPs with children frequently make such sacrifices unseen—one can't bear to travel at times when other parents are taking their children to or from school. Another misses a family she moved from their home near Westminster to the north to satisfy the local party's demand that she live locally.

Moreover, Labour needs to increase the proportion of women to slough off its male-dominated image. Research shows that women see Labour as a male party—ordinary people believe the Conservatives have the most women MPs. Equally, electoral expediency commends it, as an important target group of voters for Labour next time round will be women aged 25-50. Patricia Hewitt, who co-authored the Fabian pamphlet, *Winning Women's Votes*, maintains: "Labour needs to be a party women feel more comfortable with, and that involves getting more women MPs."

None of the executive's proposed rule changes would take effect until after the next election; in the meantime, to a generation of young women, the party looks old-fashioned and alienating. Labour may now dismiss with derision and relief the old SDP/Liberal Alliance, but it had unacknowledged virtues, not the least of which was its power to pull women into the party at local and national level. Labour should be aiming to capture the Alliance's ethos as well as its votes, without simply relying on the ambition and commitment of talented women in the party.

It is diversionary to celebrate the subtle currents beneath the ice flow: the iceberg itself has got to shift. ●

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STAND

Public enemy

The purpose of Pogo-ism is to make us all guilty. Alexander Cockburn takes issue

Americans will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of Earth day on 22 April, the day in 1970 when the environmental movement first pressed itself into the national consciousness. But has the movement actually managed to curb the polluters? The list of corporate sponsors for the anniversary does not offer much comfort.

Coinciding with that first Earth day was a cartoon by Walt Kelly, featuring Pogo, which tells us something of the relative failure of the environment to beat back the corporate despoilers. The words put in Pogo's mouth became a catchphrase, particularly among environmentalists: "we have met the enemy and he is us". The trouble is this phrase obscures the obvious point that much of the time the enemy isn't us.

Environmentalists are particularly guilty of Pogo-ism. Look at the Jan/Feb issue of *Greenpeace*, where 12 activists were asked: Where do we go from here? Bill (*Death of Nature*) McKibben answered that "we must invent nothing less than a new and humbler attitude toward the rest of creation. And we must do it quickly." Thanks, Bill. Petra Kelly, of the West German Green movement, suggested that "the problem is not the atom bomb but the hearts of people."

Usually, when people go on in this sort of style, the next thing you hear is the word—Empowerment. This dreadful word is even more popular in liberal-left circles than the equally hateful "discourse" or "subtext". Now, once upon a time there was a perfectly good word—Power. They had it and we wanted it. In moments of revolutionary upsurge we seized it, or tried to. Victor Serge once wrote a novel called *The Birth of Our Power*.

Then, one sad day, we didn't want power any more. We wanted *empowerment*. The Birth of Our Empowerment. It doesn't sound very good. Indeed the whole notion of empowerment is an offshoot of the self-realisation movement and probably, if one goes back far enough, primal scream therapy. Every time you see the word empowerment substitute power and see how it holds up.

The trouble with Pogo-ism and the idea of empowerment is that they imply we're playing on a level field. If we are all equally the enemy and if we all equally empower ourselves, then suddenly the enemy will no longer be us. In fact, there'll be no enemy and we will hold power.

This is all balls, of course. Most of the time the enemy isn't us. The damage is being inflicted by capitalists and their elected flunkeys at the federal, state and local level who are not just empowered, they hold power. Capitalists and their political representatives love to spread the blame. In the mid-1960s Daniel Patrick Moynihan, now the senior US senator from New York, endeared himself so wonderfully to the powerful (notice the difference between the empowered and the truly powerful) by saying that black people had somehow brought their situation on themselves. Blacks weren't, Moynihan suggested, worse educated, more ill-housed, less long-lived than white folk because they were victims of a racist class system. No. The fault lay in The Crisis of the Black Family.

Most of the time the enemy isn't us. The damage is being inflicted by capitalists and their elected flunkeys

Powerful people loved to hear Moynihan say this. They called him brave and unafraid to challenge conventional wisdom. In other words, he was telling them exactly what they wanted to hear.

On 15 February of this year the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a paper by four doctors titled "Racial Differences in Susceptibility to Infection by Mycobacterium Tuberculosis". It got much play in the newspapers and on television. The *New England Journal* sends out advance copies to the major media, so, on 15 February, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a big story about the TB paper, headlined "Blacks' High TB Rate May be Linked to Genetics". The *New York Times* gave it top-of-the-page play too.

The *Los Angeles Times* spelled out the big news in its first paragraph: "The disproportionately high rate of tuberculosis among the blacks, long blamed on social factors such as crowding and poverty, may result in part from greater innate susceptibility to tuberculosis infection, a surprising new study has found."

In other words, roll up the social programmes and federal and state funds allocated to battling TB among minorities. It's in their genes. There's nothing we can do. That's just what the *New England Journal* said. The four doctors reported that they had examined patients in 165 integrated Arkansas nursing homes and prisons. The patients—black and white—had been living under the same conditions and had then been exposed at the same time to a TB outbreak. Subsequent infection rates among blacks had been twice as high as for whites, suggesting "heritable differences".

One of the great epidemiologists in the US today is Dr Sam Epstein, now at the School of Medicine at the University of Illinois in Chicago. When he spoke to me he let loose with some general reflections apropos Pogo-ism: "It shifts the blame from maldistribution of resources to some genetic predispostion. Look at cancer rates in blacks. Five-year survival rates are, let's say, 38 per cent for blacks and 50 per cent for whites. Do you say that's because of genetic susceptibility, or because of limited access to health care for blacks? Blacks get the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs in industry, working on the top side of coke ovens, living close to mills and the discharge of atmospheric effluents, so they have high cancer rates.

"Now as regards these TB infections, at an early stage cells called macrophages mop up invading bacteria, prior to the first immune response. And at that point there may be differences between macrophage response between blacks and whites. But to suggest that the behaviour of the macrophages does not reflect a wide range of prior considerations—including stress, poverty, nutrition—is simplistic in the extreme, and to say they are genetically determined is nonsensical."

So, Dr Epstein said, it was all very well for those doctors to match their black and white populations at the time of the study, but there was no consideration of a wide range of prior variables: Where had the black people grown up? What had been their income levels compared to similar indices for the white patients?

When you think about all this for a minute you see the absurdity of it. Here was a study that assumed that black people growing up in Arkansas in the 1920s and '30s were, by the time they entered an old persons' home, on an average par in terms of physical resilience to elderly white persons from the same state. Phooey to Pogo-ism. Power had already taken its toll.

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What's up doc?

Mischievous entertainment? Serious investigative drama? Bob Woffinden watched "Who Bombed Birmingham?" and looks at the tradition of documentary dramas

Were the men imprisoned for the Birmingham bombings allowed to watch themselves on television on Wednesday evening? And if they were, did they recognise themselves? *Who Bombed Birmingham?* was a documentary drama about the pub bombings in 1974, which unearthed new evidence about the incident and claimed that the convicted men are innocent. Like other examples of this kind of drama *Who Bombed Birmingham?* makes viewers ask themselves: Is this true? Did they really behave like that?

This drama came out of Granada, rather than BBC, once the natural home for this kind of work—from *Cathy Come Home* on. It may be that the buffeting the BBC got in 1986, around the time of *The Monocled Mutineer* and the *Falklands Play*, has led to caution, or even cowardice within the corporation. It's noticeable that Dennis Potter's plays get a retrospective on BBC but not the documentary dramas of Tony Garnett and Ken Loach. It would be good to see their powerful *Law and Order* series—four plays about police corruption—be given another screening. One senior BBC producer recognises that it is a long time since there has been "a truly significant political drama on BBC".

It's telling that the executive producer of Granada's *Who Bombed Birmingham?* is Ray Fitzwalter, whose reputation was made not in drama but in the investigative series, *World in Action*. The World in Action team has gone on

***Who Bombed Birmingham?*: the "palpably innocent" Johnny Walker (played by Niall O'Brien) is assaulted by a prison warder.**

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to develop within the strand such documentary dramas as *Strike*, about labour unrest in Gdansk, and more recently a programme which dramatised the Thatcher cabinet at the time of the Westland crisis.

Wednesday evening's drama, then, was the work of people with much experience in the field. However, it did have some disturbing aspects which clearly show why the genre excites so much unease. It needs to be said, though, that much less unease is expressed when documentary dramas have foreign rather than domestic origins.

The immediate problem with *Who Bombed Birmingham?* is that it dealt with an unfinished story. In this respect, it was unlike Tom Stoppard's play *Squaring the Circle*, about Lech Walesa and Solidarity, or John Smithson's production of *Coded Hostile* (also for Granada), about the shootdown over Russian air-space of a South Korean airliner in 1983.

In fact, unlike other *World in Action* documentary dramas, this Granada production was not a historical piece, and it did have an ulterior motive. The $64,000 question is, will it facilitate or inhibit the release of the six palpably innocent men who stand wrongly convicted of the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings?

The drama sets Granada's own investigation, and its own journalistic team, at the centre of the action. Chris Mullin, who took the story to Granada, and Ian MacBride, who produced the *World in Action* investigations, are the protagonists. There is thus an immediate danger that the drama might seem a self-serving, self-glorifying exercise—an English version of *All the President's Men*. Regrettably, this danger was not avoided. To judge from the programme, the subject had never been explored by anyone else.

This leads to the next difficulty, which is that—doubtless for reasons of dramatic compression—investigative breakthroughs are attributed to the Granada team when they did not make them. The team, for example, is shown learning that the forensic tests could be unsafe, although in fact this had been known for some years. (See David Leigh—the *Guardian*, 19 February, 1980.)

Second, they are shown discovering photographic evidence that the men had been maltreated in police custody. Again, this material had long been in the public domain. The City of London coroner, Dr David Paul, had presented evidence to this effect at the trial of the prison warders in 1976.

Issues like these encapsulate the whole problem of dramatised documentaries—and create legitimate concerns about their verisimilitude. If some details have been manipulated to Granada's advantage, how much else has been?

Very little, I'm sure, but nevertheless such doubts shouldn't have been allowed to surface. There is no reason why the material should not have been handled in an entirely different way, which would have precluded allegations of nest-feathering on Granada's part. For example, the film could have portrayed the work of two Irish priests, Father Denis Faul and Father Raymond Murray, who in 1976 published at their own expense an enlightening pamphlet, *The Birmingham Framework: Six Innocent Men Framed for the Birmingham Pub-Bombings*.

The thrust of the drama—to discover the identities of the actual bombers—is in a long and not dishonourable journalistic tradition, which has taken root in television. For example, in 1982, two of the early *Rough Justice* programmes (BBC) named the presumed culprits in certain murders. In one of the cases, the man thought responsible had by then died and the appeal court released the wrongly-imprisoned man.

The tradition of "We Name the Guilty Men" has continued. Paul Hamann's BBC documentary *The Return* did accuse one man of the murder for which another was executed (as witnessed in Hamann's previous film, *14 Days in May*), but presented on screen virtually no evidence to support the accusation. Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line*, shown last year on Channel 4, showed a man virtually confessing to the murder for which another, Randall Adams, was serving a life sentence in America. That did lead to Adams' release. However, this type of programme, for all its popular success, has been seriously questioned as inimical to the interests of justice.

But there is a further risk with *Who Bombed Birmingham?*: that the programme itself will become the issue, distracting attention from the matter of the men's innocence. There is a precedent in the *Death on the Rock* affair, when the matter under dispute quickly became the television programme itself rather than the disturbing events which it had been investigating.

Yet it is precisely because documentary dramas do work that they generate intemperate political opposition—and deserve support. They marry two strong indigenous traditions—that of investigative reporting and of drama, offering to a large audience political argument in an entertaining form.

Faction may be the derogatory term in which documentary drama is often discussed—but this is often an excuse for ignoring the merits of the individual pieces themselves.

Compared with other countries, the tradition remains substantially under-developed here. Needless to say, it has reached the opposite extreme in the US, where the networks have been trying to boost weekend ratings by inserting dramatised reconstructions into news programmes. There, the "faction" debate is a live issue; here, with a public under-educated in the potentialities of the form, it's never really had the chance to get going. The vocal criticism has obscured the fact that much of the work done in the field has been journalistically irreproachable.

The next example of the genre is to be a documentary drama about Stalker (Yorkshire) to be networked at Easter, made by the usually excellent Peter Kosminsky. It will be interesting to see whether the general rule—the better it is, the more criticism it provokes—will apply on this occasion. ●

Granada has stepped in with *Who Bombed Birmingham?* where the BBC has fallen silent after successes like *The Monocled Mutineer* (above right) and *Cathy Come Home* (below).

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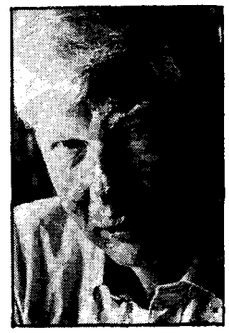
POLITICAL COLUMN

In the bunker

After Mid-Staffs, Mrs Thatcher is fighting for her political life—and may lose



R W Johnson

The Mid-Staffordshire result was the disaster that has been waiting in the wings for Mrs Thatcher almost from the word go. She has repeatedly opted for ideological purity over common sense—and then got away with it, thanks to the oil boom, or last-minute second thoughts, or the Falklands War, or the weakness of the opposition, or Scargill's own goals, or a fall in commodity prices, or just sheer, outrageous luck.

Mrs Thatcher rode that luck hard, began simply to count on it. Only months ago she was boasting of her "economic miracle", was arguing that a trade deficit was purely a matter for the private sector and no concern of government, was claiming credit for the revolutions of eastern Europe, was reasonably sure she could walk on water. Pure hubris—and the fall has come at speed. For what Mid-Staffs means is that she is fighting for her political life—and may lose.

The electorate could hardly make its point more clearly to the Tory backbenches: if you allow the next election to become a referendum on Mrs Thatcher, there will almost be no such thing as a Tory safe seat and Labour will win Finchley.

The voters have, moreover, quite correctly perceived Mrs Thatcher's personal responsibility for the poll tax. In theory, of course, when a policy has been pushed through cabinet, collective responsibility applies and no individual minister may be blamed if things go wrong. In practice, cabinet ministers are human beings, remember only too well who twisted their arms to do what, and blame that person bitterly.

The poll tax started life with a purely personal, virtually spontaneous pledge by Mrs Thatcher to abolish the rates. The reaction of hardened politicos to this was, in John McEnroe's immortal words, "you cannot be serious". Everyone had been round this circle several times before, stubbing their toes on the difficulties of tax collection, of how to make any tax local, and so on. In the end you recognised that rates were crudely graduated to wealth, easy to collect, and truly local: better just let sleeping dogs lie.

So there was, to put it mildly, no rush by Mrs Thatcher's cabinet colleagues to give effect to Madam's words. During the 1983 election campaign Mrs Thatcher was clearly stung by Labour taunts about this failure to act, so after the election she tried to push the issue—but there was no enthusiasm for it in cabinet, least of all from the relevant minister, Michael Heseltine, at Environment. Goaded further, Mrs Thatcher sought to overcome cabinet opposition to such a tax by singlehandedly inserting a pledge about rates abolition in the 1987 Tory manifesto.

When the poll tax finally got to cabinet, Mrs Thatcher was basking in the backwash of an unprecedented third election victory, favourable polls and the continuing Lawson boom. The overwhelming majority of the cabinet did not believe in the poll tax—no one was ever able to find anyone beyond Thatcher and Nicholas Ridley who did believe in it.

Mrs Thatcher has only two options: toughing it out or the State of Denis's Health

But in the face of the Prime Minister's overwhelming political strength, the cabinet majority simply abdicated: better not risk Madam's wrath by opposing her, just look hard the other way and let Madam have her ridiculous poll tax since she was so set on it. Ridley made consessions to small business and the usual narrow little circle of Tory interest groups, but otherwise the bill sailed through.

It was the same story again when the bill reached the Commons—Tory backbenchers who truly believed in the tax were hard to find even then. But the polls were good and there was a three-line whip, so the backbenchers followed the cabinet's lead and let Madam have her way. It was, even in the context of the Thatcher period, the supreme example of one-woman government.

Accordingly, when the poll tax row erupted all eyes within the Tory party turned accusingly to Madam. She, as is her wont, looked around for someone to blame. Labour councils were the obvious scapegoats, but this didn't wash when Tory councils turned out to be little different. An attempt was then made to blame Militant Tendency for all the anti-poll tax protests, but this simply maddened middle England all the more. Mid-Staffs completed the circle.

Madam was now desperately trying to pass the buck, but she had only got her tax through because the cabinet had passed it to the voters—who now roared their disapproval, passing the buck straight back to Madam.

An attempt was then made to say that what had really riled the voters was high interest rates and since these were bound to come down before the election, things weren't too serious. The trouble with that, the exit polls showed, was that only 48 per cent of voters who'd switched to Labour cited interest rates as their chief concern, far behind not merely the poll tax (87 per cent) but the health service (75 per cent)—and on the health service too the buck stops with Madam. By the weekend the polls were showing a Labour lead of up to 28 per cent—an all-time record. With that, any pretence that these were just ordinary mid-term blues simply collapsed.

So what now? On the day of the by-election the *Sun*, a privileged source in these matters, carried a remarkable story. Mrs Thatcher was, it said, prepared for a leadership challenge. If she didn't win on the first ballot, there would be no bowing out—she'd fight on to a second and a third round if necessary. And even if she then won by one vote, she would refuse to feel humiliated and would simply carry on. Such talk concedes a quite extraordinary amount of ground and suggests a fairly panicky mood down there in the bunker.

It is clearly impossible for Mrs Thatcher to admit fault and do a U-turn; or to leave under a cloud of humiliation; or to have to hand over to the hated Heseltine. That leaves only two options: toughing it out and the State of Denis's Health. If Denis diplomatically or otherwise, could now become Seriously Unwell, Mrs Thatcher could resign on urgent family grounds—and who would quarrel with that?

At the weekend, Denis was angrily attacking Tory rebels and threatening to persuade his wife to resign if they did not desist. This sounds like toughing it out; still probably the preferred way. But with a 28 per cent Labour lead the crisis is bound to continue and Denis, relaxing at the nineteenth hole, is bound to wonder ere long whether he might not do better, round about now, to develop a cough.

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SOCIETY

Hobson's choice

Ballots of the whole hospital staff on opting out would be silly, says Kenneth Clarke, since he'll only listen to those individuals who "expressed an interest" in the first place. Edward Pilkington investigates

One year from now, on 1 April 1991, the government expects many NHS hospitals to opt out of health authority control and become "self-governing trusts". It claims that this will herald a new, more efficient and more responsive health system. But as the deadline approaches, there is growing evidence that a large proportion of consultants and staff in the 79 hospitals selected as "front runners" are opposed to opting out because they fear it will be the beginning of the end of the NHS.

The front runners were drawn from a pool of 180 hospitals in which individuals, usually managers, have "expressed an interest" in opting out. But with only 12 months to go, there is mounting opposition in hospitals as diverse as hi-tec Guys (700 beds) to diminutive Lymington (86). Consultants complain they have not been properly consulted and are desperately attempting to extricate themselves from the government's plans,

No one at Guy's or Lymington dares hope that the NHS bill, now passing through Parliament, can be stopped. The only remaining question is whether they have the power to withdraw their hospital from the list of front-runners, by opting out of opting out.

Consultants at Guy's in the City hope to do just that. They are to hold a ballot on the issue in the next two months. If they vote against, it will be a great blow to the Health Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, who sees Guy's as the flagship of his NHS reforms.

Six months ago, when Clarke published the NHS white paper, Guy's was the obvious place to launch his plans to inject the NHS with a stiff dose of private sector values. As one of the largest, leanest and most efficient outfits in the country, it would be a strong competitor within the new "internal market" which Clarke wanted to create. In this market, hospital services would be sold to health authorities, GPs and the private sector. Guy's would do well, because it had specialisms which were in great demand.

Clarke could also rely on the avid support of Guy's head of surgery, Professor Ian, now Lord McColl, a convert to the concept of self-governing trusts even before the government.

Lord McColl believes that an independent Guy's will prosper because it will be able to liberate itself from red tape and political control. "I've always liked the idea of running one's own show," he says. "I've never had much trust in the bureaucracy, or in local politicians."

He subscribes to the Marks and Spencer school of management: if hospitals are dependent for their income on the happiness of their patients, then they will treat them with more respect. Bad hospitals will suffer financially, while good ones, like Guy's, will thrive.

Lord McColl thinks that the hospital's future is a matter for management to decide; neither staff nor patients should be involved. This is ironic, coming from a man who co-authored a teaching guide called *Talking with Patients*. "Of the 3,000 staff here, I predict fewer than ten have read the white paper," he says.

But he is wrong. The white paper provoked an intelligent and passionate response from all levels of the hospital's hierarchy. The staff

John Storey

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were not prepared to allow so important a decision to be made by so few.

It was here that Kenneth Clarke made a large mistake: in selecting Guy's as his flagship, he overlooked the fact that it is run differently from most other hospitals. Most have a lay administrator at the head who is appointed, and can be dismissed, by the health authority. Guy's also has a lay administrator but he is subservient to 15 consultant directors who tend to resist outside interference. The hospital has a strong tradition of clinical management, and is probably more impervious to manipulation from the Department of Health than any other in the country.

Under the outspoken leadership of Professor Harry Keen, director of general medicine, all Guy's 250 consultants have demanded to make the final decision on opting out through a ballot. If Keen has his way, that decision will be "No".

Keen does not dispute the fact that opting out would be financially beneficial. Guy's specialists would suck in patients, and with them money. But he says his loyalty to Guy's comes second to his loyalty to the NHS. "The government wants to divide us and rule," he says. "If the health service is cut up into bits, hospitals will fight each other for resources rather than shouting at the government for more."

At the centre of Keen's opposition is that he fears opting out would force the doctors to hand over their power to lay administrators, who would put money before patients. The NHS bill says that self-governing trusts will be run by boards of 11 people, five of whom would be nominated by the Secretary of State. Of the remaining six, only one would be a doctor.

Outside Guy's, a growing number of hospitals have begun to express their opposition to the NHS reforms. Eighty-two per cent of the staff in neighbouring St Thomas's, also on the list of 79, last month voted against opting out. A recent survey by the British Medical Association of 68 of the 79 front-runners found that consultants in 19 were flatly opposed, in 31 were undecided, and of the remaining 18 only a handful were unreservedly in favour.

One hospital firmly opposed to opting out is Lymington in Hampshire. It is like a doll's house version of Guy's. It has no hi-tec equipment, no 32-storey tower block, and no internationally renowned professors. Most of its staff are part-time.

While Guy's stands to profit from opting out, Lymington would almost certainly lose. It would be hard pressed to compete with large city hospitals like Guy's or the two Southampton hospitals only 17 miles away.

"I think it's all a bit of a con," says Stephen Birch, a radiologist who divides his work between Lymington and Southampton. "There's going to be no more money in the pot, so if one hospital gains, then another must lose. I fear that the winners will be the Southamptons of this world, and the losers will be the Lymingtons." The painful irony, however, is that while Guy's, the flagship of the government's reforms, will probably be able to reject opting out, little Lymington has no such choice. Although its consultants are almost unanimous in their opposition, they are powerless.

"The government wants to divide us and rule"
—Professor Harry Keen, director of general medicine, Guy's Hospital

Kenneth Clarke has said that no hospital will have to opt out unless it wants to. Yet, he also said that ballots would be inadequate, unbelievable and silly. The only people who will have a firm decision are those who expressed an interest in the first place. Clarke says they must consult but has not defined how or when this should take place or with whom.

This places hospitals like Lymington in a Catch 22. The only way it can delete its name from the list of front-runners is if it declares it is no longer interested in opting out. And the only people who can do that are those who expressed the interest in the first place.

In Guy's case this was the consultants—so it is they who will have the final say. But the initial expression of interest in Lymington was made not by staff, but by a group of local philanthropists who fundraise for the hospital, the Friends of Lymington Hospital (or Fiends as they are known). Although they were deemed eligible to express the initial interest, they were not considered competent to develop detailed plans and all responsibility was handed over to Lymington's lay administrator, Rex Barker, the general manager.

"Independence," he says, "will allow Lymington to raise private capital for the completion of a new wing." He has promised to hold an "open discussion" with the staff before taking a final decision. But he has not yet decided on the most "suitable" form of consultation. An informal ballot of Lymington's 30 consultants revealed 29 to be against opting out.

The hospital's fate theoretically lies in his hands; the view of consultants, staff and patients is largely academic. Barker himself answers to his superiors at the Department of Health and his own room for manoeuvre is limited. Ultimately, the final decision will rest with the man who says he wants to create a more accountable NHS—Kenneth Clarke.

Of the 79 front-runners, few will have the degree of democratic control enjoyed by Guy's. Most will follow Lymington's example: they will be dragged kicking and screaming into a brave new world which they played no part in creating and which they do not understand.

At least they will have learnt what a dirty business politics can be. And perhaps they will have become a little less naive. As Harry Keen puts it: "Those who ride the tiger's back end up in the tiger's stomach."

A family affair

On 5 April, married women will be taxed separately. Hilary Land looks askance at the breakthough

"We always think of a taxpayer as a dignified householder on whom the inspector calls, and not as a mere drinker of tea and eater of sultana pudding," declared a (male) member of the Co-operative Union opposing women's suffrage at the turn of this century. This view was entirely in accord with the Board of Inland Revenue's who, for tax purposes, included married women in the category of "incapacitated persons"—along with infants, lunatics and insane persons. Women achieved the vote in 1918 but it is only now, over seventy years later, that married women for the first time are going to be able to deal with their own tax affairs and, most important, *not* have either their earned or unearned income aggregated with that of their husband's *and* regarded as his.

The Board of Inland Revenue remained impervious to the Married Women's Property Acts passed between 1882 and 1907 which gave women the right to control their own property and earnings. As the Board explained to the Royal Commission on Income Tax in 1920: "The Crown is not mentioned in the acts and is consequently not bound thereby." This Royal Commission heard evidence from a number of

organisations campaigning for married women to be treated as individuals in their own right, including Mrs Purdy from the Married Women's Association. She shocked members by explaining that no tax had been paid on her income for years. She had a small business, the details of which her husband, a disabled ex-serviceman with no income apart from his pension, knew nothing. The tax authorities corresponded with him, but he had no legal means of even finding out about her financial affairs, let alone of forcing her to transfer money to him so that *he* would be able to pay tax on what was *her* income. He could, of course, have had *his* goods seized or have been sent to prison, and that remained a husband's lot in such cases until

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after the second world war.

Mrs Purdy said she was willing to pay tax but only if the authorities wrote directly to her. They went on writing to Mr Purdy and we do not know what was his fate. It was not until the late 1970s that the Board of Inland Revenue agreed to correspond directly with women about their tax affairs and the phrase "if you are a married woman, living with your husband, will you please ask him to complete the form as if it were addressed to him", disappeared.

However, although the principle of aggregation has been abandoned, the view that a wife damages a man's taxable capacity is still alive and kicking because we still have the married man's allowance (MMA), now to be called the married *couple*'s allowance. This in fact will be allocated to the husband unless he has insufficient income to make full use of it *and* he agrees to transfer it to his wife. The MMA was introduced in 1918, nine years after Lloyd George had introduced tax allowances for children for "men whose earnings just bring them within the clutches of the income tax collector... when they have a family dependent upon them, the obligation to keep up apearances of respectability of all their dependants is very trying."

Introducing his Finance Bill in 1918, the chancellor of the exchequer told the House of Commons: "I propose to make the children's allowance apply to a wife also and to extend a similar allowance to all dependants who are incapacitated." One member suggested that a wife was worth two children, but the House seemed satisfied with equating a wife with a child or a disabled person, and £25 (the value of the child allowance) was added to the personal allowance of any married income tax payer whose earned income together with his wife's earnings was less than £800 a year. By 1920, when the single person's allowance was £135 and the MMA was £225, a married woman in paid employment was allowed a maximum of £45 earned income relief to offset against her earnings, for it was recognised that expenses were incurred in having paid employment.

In order to encourage married women to take up paid employment during the second world war, the amount of earned income relief was increased to become equivalent to the single person's tax allowance and has remained at that level ever since. Thus on marriage, a woman went on paying either the same amount of tax on her earnings, or, if her husband was paying at a higher rate of tax, *more* because her earnings aggregated with his attracted the higher rate too. It was the *man*'s tax position which improved on marriage because of the MMA.

Today the MCA is even harder to defend. Under independent taxation, marriage will make no difference to the tax position of a woman, but it will still improve that of her husband. We are often told that the Duchess of Westminster does not need child benefit and that child benefit should be "targeted" on poorer families who really need them. Could someone explain why all husbands, including the Duke of Westminster, should get the MCA, and why the resources released by abolishing it would not be better spent targeted on families with children or with a carer?

FRINGE BENEFITS

The Sunday Pulp

Colin Ward

As a writer and propagandist, my method of reading the papers is to pile them up on a chair in the kitchen until the heap gets knocked down whenever the cat leaps onto it. I then, with a watching brief for other family members, cut out the interesting bits.

The acid test is my pair of scissors. This is why we gave up buying a Sunday paper ten years ago. There was too little to cut out. I wouldn't recommend any newspaper. They all fall short of my ideal. We buy the *Guardian* and the local regional daily, but long experience told me that for some kinds of information it was useful to go out and get a copy of the *Times*. This is no longer true. It *is* true that for the most detailed summary of some official report it is sensible to get a *Daily Telegraph*.

But the Sunday saga is a tale of Gresham's Law. Once upon a time the two big rivals each contained something unique. When they began their magazine supplements in the 1960s, they contained photo-journalism so good that we took the trouble to find the channels by which piles of back numbers could be got free, so teachers could fillet them to use in class. Those days are long past. The few nuggets are buried in a spoilheap of dross, so the whole enterprise is like a worked-out goldmine. Or a dead forest.

In America last year I watched a young boy on a traffic island selling the monster Sunday edition of the *New York Times* to passing motorists. By the next intersection a hundred yards further on, they had sifted out the half dozen sections they didn't want and had thrown them at the overflowing rubbish bin. If I had followed them I would, no doubt, have seen further disposals.

"How like the throwaway culture!" we say in our superior way, without noticing that we are travelling along the same road. Down the lane from us, my friend Richards does the Sunday paper round, delivering down the bumpy byways and gravel driveways. He has the usual horror stories of the way the rich are the most reluctant payers and of the appallingly fierce dogs that make the Englishman's home his castle.

But last Sunday he weighed the papers, relating their bulk to their circulation. Like me he is so old that he thinks in imperial rather than metric measures, but the result is the same in both tons and tonnes.

His first group consisted of the *News of the World*, the *Sunday Mirror* and the *People*, weighing together 1½lbs, which multiplied by a 3 million circulation gives 4½ million pounds. His second group was the *Observer*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Express* and the *Mail on Sunday*, together weighing 4lb 13oz, which multiplied by 700,000 purchasers weigh 3,370,000 pounds. Then came the newcomers, the *Sunday Correspondent* and the *Independent on Sunday*, adding up to 2½lbs. A multiplier of 300,000 circulation gives a weight of 750,000 pounds. Finally, in a class of its own, as they say, comes the *Sunday Times*, weighing 2lb 3oz. A circulation of over a million makes it up to 2½ million pounds.

Richards is looking for flaws in his arithmetic, but whichever way he examines his sums they come to around 11 million pounds. In other words 4,900 tons or tonnes of paper are used every week to bring you the Sunday paper of your choice. Unsold copies must add another 10 per cent.

I'm hoping that Friends of the Earth will tell us how many acres or hectares of Scandinavian or Canadian forests this automatic consumption represents. I'm yearning to be reassured that X per cent of it consists of recycled paper.

But where I live, first the Scouts and then the Hadleigh Youth Club tried waste paper collection. The latter organisation installed a huge container in George Street, Hadleigh. The populace thankfully filled it with paper but the club found that fluctuation in the international market made their contribution hardly worth collecting. Meanwhile, Britain actually imports *American* waste paper.

Market forces are an appalling guide to right conduct. They ensure that you and I are faced with 4,900 tonnes of paper every Sunday just to make sure the advertisements we don't read end up on our breakfast table. To fill the spaces in between they all have the same variations on holidays, the same features on properties in the hinterland of Toulouse or Berkshire, the virtues of houseplants or garlic or Philip Larkin's sex-life. Most cynical of all are their guides to being a green consumer.

It wasn't until this year that I ever got asked to join this Sunday space-filling. They tell me it's well-paid and you never know who might be out there, waiting for the message. I'll try hard like I always do, but I can't help thinking that the best thing you or I could do for the Sunday press is the simple act of not buying it.

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All work and low pay

Mike George looks at a new growth area in casual jobs for women

The big growth in private care or nursing homes—the number of beds provided has jumped by 350 per cent in the last decade—has ensured the growth of a significant employment sector for women: especially for nurses, nursing auxiliaries, cooks, cleaners, and care attendants. Like shopwork it offers convenient local employment, with the opportunity of working a variety of shifts which fit in with domestic responsibilities. However, also like some shopwork, private homes frequently offer poor wages and conditions—a common feature of today's casualised work.

Just over a year ago, staff at the Craiglea Nursing Home in Gateshead decided they had to take industrial action because they said care standards had become so poor. They were sacked. Phil Lenton, NUPE's Area Officer was involved in a 10-month dispute with the home owners, trying to get staff reinstated. The management refused. Phil then helped to find alternative jobs for the sacked staff: none of the home owners approached asked for references or details of previous employment.

Both casualisation and the fragmented nature of the private sector make union organisation difficult to achieve. Before the housing market slumped, many firms in the private sector were achieving profit rates of 40 per cent—largely based on the rapid appreciation of property prices (homes were continually bought and sold). However, industry analysts now suggest that profits are no more than 6-7 per cent in general. Consequently there is increased pressure to cut labour costs (the largest element of the cost of running homes).

The West Midlands Low Pay Unit receives a steady stream of compaints from workers in homes—many of them about poor wages; rates of £1.50 to £1.80 are cited, while YTS trainees are often getting no more than £1 an hour. Two other regional Low Pay Units have carried out surveys of wages and conditions of workers in this sector*. They found unqualified care assistants who earn little more than £2 an hour,

In West Yorkshire, nurses in private homes are being paid £1.70 an hour—a nurse in the NHS would get £4.95

with kitchen staff and cleaners regularly being paid less than that. NUPE divisional offices are currently aware of care attendants being paid £1.85 an hour: the equivalent job in local authority homes commands £3.07 an hour—and this is commonly regarded as too low. In West Yorkshire enrolled nurses in private homes are being paid £1.70 to £2.40 an hour—the equivalent for this grade of nurse in the NHS is £4.50 an hour.

These low basic rates tend to be paid for all hours worked—overtime and shift premiums are uncommon—and unlike workers in local authority homes there are no extras for unsocial hours or working on rest days. NUPE and the Low Pay Unit also cite a lack of holiday or sick pay (many workers thinke they're self-employed, although they're not), and it's quite common to find workers without any formal contract of employment or itemised payslip.

One of the consequences of this casualisation is a lack of training and care standards. Care assistants and attendants are frequently required to administer medication, to replace dressings, and carry out other "nursing" duties—although few have any formal training. Staff also complain that there is inadequate access to qualified help in times of emergency. Back complaints are common among workers —who haven't been given any tuition in the technique of lifting heavy patients.

The surveys also highlight a disturbing number of instances of inadequate or semi-punitive regimes—ranging from tight control over meals (two chickens for 30 residents), to 5am "wake-up" times, as inadequate numbers of staff try to get everyone washed and dressed in time for breakfast. Staff turnover is often high, and not only because wages and conditions are poor—they're also upset about the way they are forced to treat residents.

The new management regime envisaged in the NHS & Community Care Bill may give local authorities more control over the standards in private sector homes to which they send elderly people. In the meantime, trade union organising efforts continue; in Gateshead, for example, COHSE, NUPE and NALGO are in the process of drawing up plans for cooperation in recruitment and recognition campaigns.

As our "greying" population grows, almost all of us have a legitimate personal interest in making sure that we have high standards of care available when we ourselves become vulnerable. Casualisation of work in these crucial caring occupations does none of us any good.

**"The Cost of Caring", West Yorkshire Low Pay Unit, Field Hill Centre, Batley Field Hill, Batley, WF17 OBQ. "Care On The Cheap", Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit, 23 New Mount Street, Manchester M4 4DE.*

WELFARE WATCH

Unfair to pairs

By the time this column appears, who knows what further climb-down the government may have performed? I can only report that, at the time of writing, the unfairness to married or cohabiting couples of the poll tax rebate scheme (see *Welfare Watch* 16 March), has not been removed either by the doubling of the capital limit in the budget or by the consolation prize offered to Scotland two days later.

The source of the unfairness is that a given amount of savings has the same effect on a couple's rebate as on a single person's. Attention has focused on the £8,000 cut-off point—now raised to £16,000—above which, regardless of income level, full poll tax is payable without any rebate at all. But far more couples are penalised by the fact that, for single people and couples alike, every £250 of capital over £3,000 is assumed to produce income of £1 a week, which is taken into account in calculating their rebate.

The effect is that a couple, each with £3,000 capital, lose £93.60 more from their annual rebate than two single people with the same amount of capital. The penalty is the same at higher levels of capital, up to the new £16,000 cut-off point.

The unfairness, however, is not confined to the poll tax rebate. In fact, the penalties for thrift are stiffer for those claiming other benefits which are subject to a sharper "taper". Housing benefit, for instance, has a taper of 65 per cent: every additional £1 of income, including the assumed income from capital, reduces the benefit by 65p, compared with the 15p by which poll tax rebates are reduced.

This means that a couple with capital over £3,000 each, claiming a rent rebate under the housing benefit scheme, can have £7.80 a week deducted from their rebate—an annual loss of £405.60. The combined effect on rent and poll tax rebates is that they lose £499.20 more than two single people with the same total savings.

For a couple on income support the loss can be greater still. The whole of the assumed income from their capital, not just a percentage, is knocked off their benefit, resulting in a loss of up to £122 a week or £624 more a year than two single people.

Such losses may be rare in practice, because few couples on income support have much capital and, of those who do, few would otherwise be entitled to income support of £12 or more—which explains why this anomaly has aroused so little complaint in the past. But housing benefit and the poll tax have created a new situation in which far more people with a few thousand pounds savings are potentially entitled to substantial amounts of benefit. Just the sort of people who deserted the government in the mid-Staffs bye-election. It would be surprising if something were not done to placate them in the near future.

Tony Lynes

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Society Today is *NSS*'s term-time page for sociology students

Strike it rich

Pat McNeill looks at all the ways workers protest against low pay and poor conditions

After six months of the most highly publicised strike since the miners, the ambulance staff have voted to accept the pay offer recommended by their unions' executives and have returned to work.

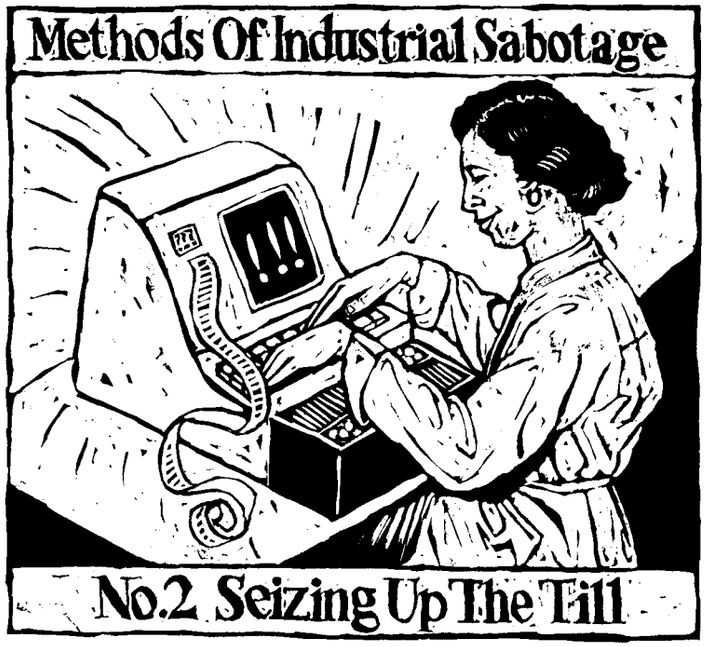
This strike was unusual in a number of ways. Perhaps the most interesting sociologically was the amount of public support that the strikers received, not least the huge sums of money donated in street collections. Whatever else Roger Poole and his PR advisers achieved, they certainly broke down the tabloid press's stereotype of union leaders as hard-left conspirators, dominating and deluding their naive and trusting members for sinister political purposes of their own.

At no stage was it even hinted that the unions might be receiving money from Moscow or Libya. We had no TV film of confrontations with the police on picket lines, just pictures of groups of aggrieved and determined people rather self-consciously doing something they would really prefer not to do, but to which they could see no alternative.

Another stereotype was, however, reinforced. The idea of industrial conflict is automatically associated in many people's minds with industrial action, especially strike action. There is a related tendency to assume that if there is no action there is no conflict.

Sociologists have shown, however, that conflict in the workplace reveals itself in less obvious ways than strikes, overtime bans and working-to-rule. This can manifest itself in high levels of absenteeism, a high turnover of staff, acts of sabotage, extensive pilfering and theft, and general inefficiency and unwillingness to do more than the minimum necessary to avoid the sack. Typically, these actions are undertaken individually rather than collectively and are not formally organised. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that because there is no formal organisation of, for example, pilfering, there are no norms or informal systems governing the behaviour.

A frequently quoted source on industrial sabotage, Taylor and Walton (1971), defines it as "rule-breaking which takes the form of conscious action or inaction directed towards the mutilation or destruction of the work environment (this includes the machinery of production and the commodity itself)". They cite examples such as the deliberate jamming of conveyor belts; "accidentally" pressing too many buttons on a till all at once to make it seize up; and failing to report defects which will certainly result in breakdown in the future.



Judy Stevens

Many of their examples are now very dated for a modern economy in which just over 20 per cent of the workforce is involved in manufacturing, but their classification of types of sabotage is still relevant. They identify three types: first, individual and collective attempts to reduce the tension and frustration of work (these may also be great fun!); second, attempts to make the work less demanding or quicker; third, attempts to exercise control over the work situation. By using these categories, it becomes possible to uncover the meaning of what may appear to be irrational activities.

Taylor and Walton even suggest that the type of sabotage encountered may be an indicator of the type of strains present in a workplace. Thus spontaneous destruction may indicate workers' generalised feelings of powerlessness where there is no organisation to represent them, whereas breakdowns tend to happen where workers feel dominated by the pace of the industrial process on which they are working.

In a modern economy, sabotage will take new forms which are more and more likely to involve computers. Computer programmers exercise a great deal of ingenuity in developing systems that are capable of detecting and pointing out mistakes made by human operatives, and systems which cannot be broken into by outsiders in search of secret information. But they have also to build in safeguards against deliberate sabotage, of which the notorious computer "viruses" are currently attracting most attention.

Pilfering and theft in workplaces have been extensively studied by Mars (1982). He describes dozens of methods of fiddling and cheating employers, and classifies them into four types. For the purposes of this article, the key point that he makes is that workplace crimes "far from being the exceptional activity of the minority, are an integral aspect of all the occupations they include". Some occupations, such as those in the personal services sector, are so fiddle-prone that it is impossible to understand industrial relations, strikes or resistance to innovation unless this aspect of work experience is taken into account.

Mars cites the example of the firemen's strike of 1977 when a hitherto non-militant workforce went on national strike in support of a large pay claim. Mars's controversial explanation is that the firemen became aware that their traditional, and forbidden, perk of being able to take a second job following the relatively undemanding night shift was threatened by a shortage of appropriate jobs. Accordingly, firemen looked for a disproportionate increase in their legitimate pay, which they had hitherto accepted as being relatively low.

Similarly, he says, dustmen became more strike-prone when their opportunities for "totting" (scavenging through the rubbish for saleable items) were virtually wiped out by the new technology of bin-liners and "macerating" dustcarts.

Though employers and employees share an interest in the overall success of any commercial enterprise, their relationship is fundamentally one of competing interests: the size of the employers' profits is inversely related to the size of the employees' wages or salary. The same logic applies in the public sector, albeit in a different form. Workers resist the power of employers in many ways, and strikes are the least common of them.

Discussion:

How far can you apply Taylor and Walton's typology to the actions of school or college students?

Mars, G (1982) "Cheats at Work" Allen and Unwin
Taylor, L and Walton, P (1971) "Industrial Sabotage; Motives and Meanings" in Cohen, S "Images of Deviance" Pelican

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Tyranny of the foetus

Pregnant women are under surveillance by the authorities. Are they taking care of their babies? Mothers are arrested if their new-born child tests positive for drugs. The demand for foetal rights deprives women of theirs, argues Katha Pollitt.

Katha Pollitt is working on a collection of essays about women's issues. She is the author of "Antarctic Traveller", a collection of poems

Some scenes from the way we in America live now. In a New York restaurant, a pregnant woman orders a glass of wine with her meal. A stranger comes over to her table. "Don't you know you're poisoning your baby?" he says angrily, pointing to a city-mandated sign warning women that drinking during pregnancy can cause birth defects.

In California, Pamela Stewart is advised by her obstetrician to stay off her feet, to eschew sex and "street drugs" and to go to the hospital immediately if she starts to

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Christine Roche

bleed. She fails to follow this advice and delivers a brain damaged baby who soon dies. She is charged with failing to deliver support to a child under an old criminal statute that was intended to force men to provide for women they have made pregnant.

In Washington DC, a hospital administration asks a court whether it should intervene and perform a caesarean on Angela Carder, seriously ill with cancer, against her wishes and those of her husband, parents and doctors. Acknowledging that the operation would probably shorten her life without necessarily saving the life of her 25-week-old foetus, the judge nonetheless provides the order. The caesarean is performed, before her lawyers can appeal. Angela Carder dies; so does her unviable foetus.

Mothers are arrested when their newborn babies test positive for drugs

In the midwest, the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit ruling in UAW v Johnson Controls, upholds a car battery plant's seven-year-old "foetal protection policy" barring fertile women (in effect, all women) from jobs that would expose them to lead. The court discounts testimony about the individual reproductive lives and plans of female employees (many in their late 40s, celibate and/or with completed families). The testimony shows that no child born to female employees had shown ill effects traceable to lead exposure and that lead poses a comparable danger to male reproductive health. The court accepts that making the workplace safe would be too expensive.

All over the country, pregnant women who use illegal drugs or alcohol are targeted by the criminal justice system. They are "preventively detained" by judges who mete out jail sentences for minor crimes that would ordinarily result in probation or a fine; charged with child abuse or neglect (although by law the foetus is not a child) and threatened with manslaughter charges should they miscarry. They are placed under court orders not to drink, although drinking is not a crime and does not invariably (or even usually) result in birth defects.

State legislatures are pondering bills that would authorise the questionable practices by criminalising drug use or "excessive" alcohol use during pregnancy (California Senator Pete Wilson is pushing a similar bill at the federal level). Mothers are being arrested in their hospital beds when their new born babies test positive for drugs. Social workers increasingly remove positive-testing babies into foster care on the presumption that even a single use of drugs during pregnancy renders a mother *ipso facto* an unfit parent.

What's going on? The hot area in the developing issue of "foetal rights" is currently the use of drugs and alcohol during pregnancy. There have been nightly news reports of inner-city intensive care units overflowing with crack babies; of Indian reservations where one in four children are said to be born physically and mentally stunted by foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) or the milder, but still serious, foetal alcohol effect. There's also been the front-page stories reporting studies that suggest staggering rates of drug use during pregnancy (11 per cent, according to the *New York Times,* or 375,000 women per year) and the dangers of even moderate drinking during pregnancy.

But drugs and alcohol are only the latest focus of a pre-occupation with the foetus and its "rights" that has been wandering around the *zeitgeist* for the past decade. A few years ago, the big issue was forced caesareans. If the Supreme Court upholds the Johnson Controls decision, the next battleground may be the workplace. The "save the babies" mentality may look like a necessary, if troubling, approach when it's a matter of keeping a drug addict away from a substance that is, after all, illegal.

What happens if the same mentality is applied to some 15 to 20 million highly paid unionised jobs in heavy industry to "protect" foetuses that do not even exist? Or if the list of things women are put on legal notice to avoid expands to

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We deny the basic right of bodily integrity to pregnant women and give the foetus rights we deny children

match medical findings on the dangers to the foetus posed by junk food, salt, aspirin, air travel and cigarettes?

Critics of the punitive approach to pregnant drug and alcohol users point out the ironies inherent in treating a public health concern as a matter for the criminal justice system: the contradiction, for instance, of punishing addicted women when most drug treatment programmes refuse to accept pregnant women. Indeed, Jennifer Johnson, a Florida woman who was the first person convicted after giving birth to a baby who was positive on a cocaine test, had been refused treatment. (In her case the charge was delivering drugs to a minor.)

The critics point out that threats of jail or the loss of their kids may drive women away from prenatal care and hospital births and that almost all women affected so far have been poor and black or latino, without private doctors to protect them. In Florida, non-white women are ten times as likely to be reported for substance abuse as white women, althought rates of drug use are actually higher for whites.

These are all important points. But they leave unchallenged the notion of foetal rights itself. What we really ought to be asking is, how have we come to see women as the major threat to the health of their newborn children, and the womb as the most dangerous place a child will ever inhabit? Why is our basic model "innocent" foetuses that would be fine if only "guilty" women refrained from indulging their "whims"? The list of dangers to the foetus is, after all, very long; the list of dangers to children even longer. Why does maternal behaviour seem such an urgent matter, while much more important factors—that one in five pregnant women receive no prenatal care at all, for instance—attract so little attention?

It would be pleasant to report that the aura of crisis surrounding crack and FAS babies—the urge to do something, however unconstitutional or cruel, that suddenly pervades society, from judge's bench to chic dinner party to 7 o'clock news—was part of a massive national campaign to help women have healthy, wanted pregnancies and healthy babies. But significantly, the current wave of concern is not occurring in that context. Judges order pregnant addicts to jail, but they don't order drug treatment programmes to accept them, or Medicaid, which pays for heroin treatment, to cover crack addiction. They don't order landlords not to evict them, or obstetricians to treat uninsured women, or the federal government to fund fully the Women, Infants and Children supplemental feeding programme, which reaches only two-thirds of those eligible.

While rightly sounding the alarm about the health risks and social costs of drugs, alcohol and nicotine, the various "just say no" crusades have so upped the moral ante across the board that it is now difficult to distinguish between levels and kinds of substance use and abuse, and even rather suspect to try. A joint on the weekend is the moral equivalent of a 24-four-hour-a-day crack habit; wine with meals is next door to a daily quart of rotgut. The stigmatising of addicts, casual users, alcoholics, social drinkers and smokers makes punitive measures against them palatable. It also helps us avoid uncomfortable questions about why we are having all these "substance abuse" epidemics in the first place. Finally, it lets us assume, not always correctly, that drugs and alcohol, by themselves, cause harm during pregnancy, and ignore the role of malnutrition, violence, serious maternal health problems and lack of medical care.

Anti-choicers have not succeeded in criminalising abortion but they have made it inaccessible to millions of women (only 16 states pay for poor women's abortions) and made it a badge of sin and failure for millions more. In Sweden, where heavy drinking is common, relatively few FAS babies are born, because alcoholic women have ready access to abortion and it is not a stigmatised choice.

In the US, anti-choice sentiment makes it impossible to suggest to a homeless, malnourished, venereally diseased crack addict that her first priority ought to be getting well: get help, then have a baby. While the possibility of coerced abortions is something to be wary of, the current policy of regulation and punishment in the name of the foetus ironically risks the same end. Faced with criminal charges, pregnant women may seek abortions in order to stay out of jail (a Washington DC, woman who "miscarried" a few days before sentencing may have done just that).

As lobbyists, anti-choicers have sought to bolster their cause by interjecting the foetus-as-person argument into a wide variety of situations that would seem to have nothing to do with abortion. They have campaigned, for example, to classify as homicides assaults on pregnant women that result in foetal death or miscarriage. Little by little the areas in which the woman is regarded as the foetus' container is broadened.

At a deeper level, the "pro-life" movement has polluted the way we think about pregnancy. It is becoming a condition that by its very nature pits women and foetuses against each other, with the foetus invariably taking precedence. The woman is portrayed as selfish, confused, potentially violent and incapable of making responsible choices. As the "rights" of the foetus grow and respect for the capacities and rights of women declines, it becomes harder and harder to explain why drug addiction is a crime if it produces a miscarriage, and why a woman can choose abortion but not vodka. And that is just what the "pro-lifers" want.

Pro-choice activists rightly argue that anti-abortion and foetal-rights advocates grant foetuses more rights than women. A point less often made is that they grant foetuses more rights than two-year-olds—rights, for example, to a safe, healthy place to live.

No court in this country would ever rule that a parent must undergo a medical procedure in order to benefit a child, even if that procedure is as riskless as a blood donation and the child is sure to die without it. Nor would a court force someone who had promised to donate a kidney and then changed his mind to keep his date with the organ bank. Yet, as the forced caesarean issue shows, we seem willing to deny the basic right of bodily integrity to pregnant women and to give the foetus rights we deny children.

Although concern for the foetus may look like a way of helping children, it is actually, in a funny way, a substitute for it. It is an illusion to think that by "protecting" the foetus from its mother's behaviour we have ensured a healthy birth, a healthy infancy or a healthy childhood, and that the only insurmountable obstacle for crack babies is prenatal exposure to crack.

It is no coincidence that we are obsessed with pregnant women's behaviour at the same time that children's health is declining, by virtually any yardstick one chooses. Take general well-being: in constant dollars, welfare payments are now about two-thirds the 1965 level. Take housing: thousands of children are now growing up in homeless shelters and welfare hotels. Even desperately alcoholic women bear healthy babies two-thirds of the time. Will two-thirds of today's homeless kids emerge unscathed from their dangerous and lead-permeated environments? Take access to medical care: inner-city hospitals are closing all over the country, millions of kids have no health insurance and most doctors refuse uninsured or Medicaid patients. Even immunisation rates are down. Whooping cough and measles are on the rise.

The worst thing about foetal rights is that it portrays a woman as having only contingent value. Her work, her health, her choices and needs and beliefs, can all be set aside in an instant because, next to maternity, they are all perceived as trivial. For the middle class, foetal rights is mostly symbolic, the gateway to a view of motherhood as self-sacrifice and endless, guilty soul-searching. It ties in neatly with the currently fashionable suspicion of working mothers, day care and (now that wives are more likely than husbands to sue for it) divorce. For the poor, for whom it means jail and the loss of custody it becomes a way of saying that women can't even be mothers. They can only be potting soil.

"People are always talking about women's duties to others," said Lynn Paltrow, the ACLU lawyer who successfully led the Pamela Rae Stewart defence, "as though women were not the chief caregivers in this society. But no one talks about women's duty of care to themselves. A pregnant addict ot alcoholic needs to get help for herself. She's not just potentially ruining someone else's life. She's ruining her own life.

"Why isn't her own life important? Why don't we care about her?" ●

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Clare Jarrett

Before hindsight

THE LONG MARCH TO THE FOURTH OF JUNE
Li Xiao Jun; translated by E J Griffiths
Duckworth £14.95
SEEDS OF FIRE: CHINESE VOICES OF CONSCIENCE
Edited by Geremie Barmé and John Minford
Bloodaxe Books £7.95

Cyril Lin

In the aftermath of the 4th June Beijing massacre last year, the key questions for western China specialists and policy makers were, why did it happen; and what are its implications? One convenient answer to the first was that it was, in a sense, inevitable. China, despite liberalising tendencies, is fundamentally a totalitarian state and this is how totalitarian regimes deal with dissent. After the fact, this answer is as correct as it is superficial.

Until mid-May last year, no one to my knowledge predicted the massacre. By then it appeared that radical reformers had lost and a clampdown of some sort was inevitable. Even then, few believed that the Chinese leadership needed to or dared employ the violent solution that it subsequently did. It is significant that Chinese who have grown up, or old, or wise under communist rule, many with intimate knowledge of their country's political processes and predilections, were the first to discount the probability of what eventually transpired. They insisted that no Chinese leadership would be foolish enough to risk political suicide by resorting to such means. No precedent existed in the history of the People's Republic. Even the ruthless Gang of Four avoided the use of bullets and tanks to quell the Tiananmen demonstrations of April 1976.

Emotional *post mortems* on 4th June may focus too much on "why the brutality?" and too little on what the popular dissent, and its suppression, signify. Attempts to address the nature and sources of Chinese dissent typically advance big words and big concepts to explain the causes of unrest. These include the revolution in rising expectations, inflation, exposure to western ideas and goods, demands for political pluralism consequent on economic development, and so on. All these explanations are probably true, but they may be merely symptoms of a deeper malaise.

Li Xiao Jun's book *The Long March to the Fourth of June* purports to be an inside (and "impartial") account of Chinese political culture from the horse's mouth. The author (Li Xiao Jun is a pen name) is said to be "a senior Chinese official in one of China's top State Council organisations". It is somewhat surprising that, despite these credentials, there is hardly anything in the book which is not already known to serious students of Chinese politics in the west. Many of the titbits and "facts" about the inner workings of the Chinese party leadership "revealed" here repeat information already available in various Red Guards documents from the Cultural Revolution.

Nor is the argument of the book particularly original. Its central message is that both the popular unrest in Beijing last year and its brutal suppression stem from China's twin obsessions. These are to reclaim its position as a great power through economic modernisation, and to modernise through western hardware without corrupting traditional Chinese "values". It is a dismal history of the repeated failure of reform since the turn of the century.

The journey runs from the initial promise of Marxism (as a shortcut to modernisation with a human face) in the twenties, past its "sinification" by Mao Zedong in the thirties and forties. It continues through its disastrous implementation in the fifties and sixties, and finally reaches the retention in the last two decades of a façade of Marxist-Maoist ideology by the post-Mao leadership, without which the communist party and its aged leaders have no claim to legitimacy.

Its account of the viciousness and mendacity of the *dramatis personae* in Chinese realpolitik helps explains the brutality of 4th June. One of the saddest but truest observations made is that not only do Chinese politicians have to be manipulative and ruthless to survive, but they also have to be *seen* to be so to gain respect.

The best understanding of the sources of China's deep malaise comes not from a bird's eye historical overview, but from a worm's eye view. *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Dissent* is an anthology of Chinese protest literature. It is an outstanding collection of short stories, poems, prose, excerpts from novels, plays, sketches, songs, interviews, declarations, manifestos—the lot—concerned with *la condition humaine chinoise* in the 20th century. Authors range from the most prominent Chinese men of letters (past and present) and leading dissidents (Fang Lizhi, Wang Ruoshui, Wei Jingsheng) to obscure amateur political theorists and simple nobodies.

Some of the writings are sophisticated, many others clumsy, pretentious and primitive. The latter are the most moving, like little children expressing profound and complex truths with

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the simplest idioms. Whether concerned with heavyweight analysis of the Chinese polity, the tragi-comedy of labour camps and pompous officials, or with traditional sexual attitudes and eating habits, the common theme is one of protest. It is a protest not only against the lack of western-style democracy and human rights, but against literally everything under the sun. As such, it expresses the Chinese people's predicament: of a people aware both of its past historical greatness and its present material and intellectual backwardness.

This book reveals an anguished soul. The harshness of this self-criticism leads sometimes to facile simplifications, such as the belief that Chinese feudal traditions are to blame for its ills (the same "feudalism" did not prevent Japan, Korea or Taiwan from modernising). The bleakness of the Chinese condition depicted makes for very depressing reading at times. Many of the complaints registered were aired during the 4th May 1919 period of dissent After 70 years, back to square one!

Seeds of Fire does offer clues to the Chinese malaise and explains, more eloquently than any social scientist armed with conceptual kits, why 4th June 1989 happened. The weals and woes of Chinese dissidents contained here suggest that three good meals of fine white rice may no longer be enough. The book should also dispel notions that the Chinese, being "Chinese", do not really know what democracy is about, or do not want it, or are not ready for it.

Sex and destiny

SEXUAL PERSONAE; ART AND DECADENCE FROM NEFERTITI TO EMILY DICKINSON
Camille Paglia
Yale University Press £25

Elizabeth Wilson

This book should be enough to disprove single-handed all recent theories of fragmentation in the postmodern world and the breakdown of the "grand narratives" of history. This is a grand narrative and a half: Oswald Spengler rewritten by Barbara Cartland, an exhaustive journey through the whole of western art, from the "chthonian" ("of the earth") origins of western civilisation to Emily Dickinson, with a companion volume promised on film, TV, sports and rock music. Indeed, the author's stated purpose is to reject "the modernist idea that culture has collapsed into meaningless fragments", and she admits her largest ambition is to "fuse Frazer with Freud". I was under the impression that Freud had done a bit of that himself, but never mind.

The most attractive characteristic of this book is its enormous enthusiasm. Camille Paglia comes fresh to some of the most discussed writers of the western canon, including Shakespeare and the currently fashionable Baudelaire, and communicates to the reader her own love of and fascination with their works. Her main theme appears to be the persistence of certain "pagan" themes throughout western art, despite the influence of Christianity.

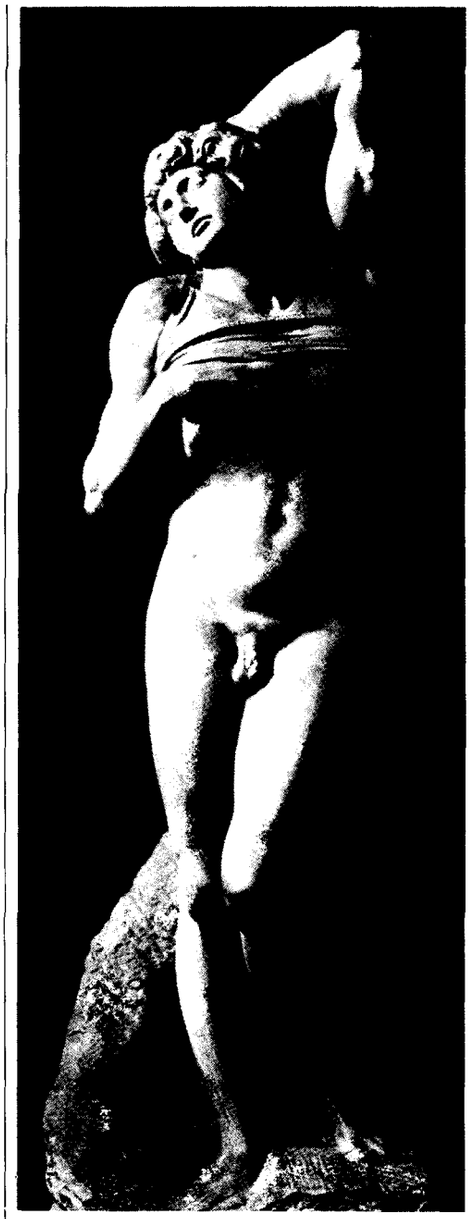
Part of the value that Camille Paglia gives to this "paganism" is its aristocratic hierarchism. For example, she compares Chaucer to Edmund Spenser: "Chaucer's comic persona resembles that of Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp, whom I seem to be alone in loathing." The populism of Chaucer makes "my skin crawl", whereas Spenser has grandeur and recognises what Paglia sees as the operatic nature of sexual attraction and sexual identity or "persona". Unlike poor Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, *The Faerie Queen* is full of "sex and glamour".

She traces the persistence of androgynous romantic ideals through the centuries, and her book is full of interesting insights. For example, she describes the ending of Theophile Gautier's novel *Mademoiselle Maupin* as "an autoerotic elopement". Her discussion of the theme of transvestism here leads down the byway of female transvestism in film, with value judgments such as that the cross dressing of Garbo and Dietrich is "merely titillating", a "Hollywood transplant of Weimar perversity". As in a stream of consciousness, we then find ourselves contemplating the fetishism of male transvestites. The whole passage never clarifies how "Weimar perversity" is different from and inferior to the grand romanticism of 19th century androgyny.

In a strange way the whole book appears caught in a time warp. Paglia seems unfamiliar with the critical work that has been done on film, while Michel Foucault is conspicuous by his absence. Presumably she would radically disagree with his emphasis on historicity, but to ignore his work gives an impression of critical naivety. On the other hand, Harold Bloom, Leslie Fiedler and others from an earlier generation do seem to have influenced Paglia. As I read I felt at times transported back to a distant era, the late fifties perhaps, when a mixture of Freudianism and gloomy urban romanticism created an aesthetic similar to that found here.

Reminiscent of that period is the oversimplification of the grand theory, which brings writers from every place and period under the general umbrella of a "decadence" never defined with sufficient clarity or accuracy. In some ways Paglia's assessment of Dickinson, for example, is powerful. Her emphasis on the sadistic and mechanical imagery with which the poems abound I found very interesting, but is it really helpful to liken her to "a homosexual cultist draping himself in black leather and chains"? Such disregard for historical specificity ends up seeming sensationalist.

What I found most irritating about this enormous curate's egg was the author's unselfconscious romanticism. She goes on about the "dark power" of sex and its "primitive urges". Liberalism in general and feminism in particular are castigated as futile in trying to tame the sexual "daemons" to which we are all in thrall. As with so much else in the book, there is a grain of truth in her criticism of some feminist strategies, but it would have been much sharper had she bothered to work through her insights instead of splurging it all out in the arrogance of her unjustified claims to originality. The feminism of s/m lesbians, for instance, would be quite in harmony with some of her views; her comments on Baudelaire would have benefited had she paid attention to the recent engagement with his work of postmodern critics.



Monumental cliché? The Dying Slave by Michelangelo

Perhaps my points seem petty, part of my resistance to the whole enterprise of using "sensationalism" to rescue western literature from the library. In her own terms, though, Paglia's theory rests on an unresolved tension. The androgynous/homoerotic/lesbian figure is placed as the high point of western "Appollonian" (a very Spenglerian term) art in a perennial effort to overcome the earthy Great Mother, the all-engulfing womb. Is this a deep insight into the ultimate truth of western culture? Or is it a monumental cliché? I really don't know.

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A fine romance

THE PRINCE
Celia Brayfield
Chatto & Windus £13.95
DISGRACE
Barbara Hulanicki
Sidgwick & Jackson £12.95
PRIVATE VIEW
Audrey Slaughter
Doubleday £12.95

Angela McRobbie

I read all three of these books under the most auspicious circumstances. *The Prince* saw me through a day return on British Rail from Kings Cross to Durham and back. The following day I had the flu and read *Disgrace* in bed, and by Saturday evening I was recovering on the sofa and opted for *Private View* rather than *thirty-something*.

Far from sending me into paroxysms of pleasure all three novels had a sobering effect. I began to see how advantageous it was for publishers and for the expanded mass media that popular fiction, including romance, "pulp" and good old bodice rippers, should have emerged in recent years with such impeccable credentials. Thanks to feminist criticism, what was once considered a form of mildly ridiculous escapism for dopey housewives has a new respectability. Feminists showed conclusively that Mills and Boon fans were neither simpletons nor victims of *Gone With the Wind* syndrome. Apart from hinting at the masturbatory factor (which makes pulp romance upfront porn for women), these critics showed how it also gave women a reason to retreat from the family for a bit of privacy.

One of the effects of this kind of cultural analysis was to challenge the barriers between high and low culture. By recognising the pleasure of fantasy, critics have rescued pulp fiction and soap opera from the junkhouse of "light entertainment". There was also the desire to restore value to the leisure activities of groups whose taste has been disregarded and downgraded.

The irony is that this process coincided almost exactly with the producers of culture exploiting this new middle ground for all that it is worth. Self-consciousness, an element of parody and an appearance on Jonathan Ross mean that almost any piece of commercial mass culture can qualify simultaneously as pure entertainment and pure postmodernism. So a book can flop completely on sales but can still do wonders for the publishers. It is even possible to do publicity about the publicity. Thus, well in advance of publication we knew that an inspection copy of *The Prince* was sent to Buckingham Palace, and that press copies have gone out without the final chapters where the Prince's choice of a bride is finally revealed. There is also the "significant" fact of the book's editor being Virago founder Carmen Callil.

In fact *The Prince* is a thin story with cardboard characters. Three nice girls, an American go-getter, an English rose and a black law student meet up at Cambridge (which means they must be at least slightly more intelligent than their real-life counterparts), and over an unspecified period of time are bedded by the Prince, a fictitious brother of Charles and the rest. The narrative problem posed by these prospective brides is that for the plot to be viable they must have no ambitions beyond the royal bed and no nasty habits beyond giggling and indulging themselves clothes-wise. They can be neither scheming, calculating nor even plain old bitchy. And since soap, pulp and romance thrive on the presence of villainesses, the story falls flat.

The book's invidious quality is that while it trades on the breaking down of barriers between high and low culture, the narrative resurrects them: the "lower orders" are coarse, slobbish and loud-mouthed and most of them work as reporters or photographers for the sensationalist press. One of them is so low as to masturbate as he waits in the bushes for a glimpse of a would-be royal bride. Homosexuals are equally predatory, particularly the gay shop assistant who dares to look at the Prince's crotch with his "reptilian eyes".

Barbara Hulanicki (creator of Biba) writes as though she is whispering her memoirs into a crackling microphone with a bottle of brandy by her side. *Disgrace* is so unfocussed as to be positively avant garde. Two sisters of Polish extraction living in Kensington in the sixties "get caught up in Swinging London". They dislike each other and go their separate ways. The pretty one ends up with drug dealers in St Tropez and dies of an overdose. The less attractive Milla feels compelled to exploit men and blackmails one into giving her the money she needs to set up shop in South Ken. I had hoped at least for some detail of the fads and fashions of the period, but no such luck.

The 'lower orders' are coarse, snobbish and loud-mouthed, and most of them work as reporters or photographers for the sensationalist press

Private View is a much more straightforward work of pop fiction. It does its readers justice by doing away with the camp and kitsch and getting down to business. It too resurrects the old class barriers. Geoffrey, the upwardly mobile TV director husband who marries Kate at 18 for her title and her connections, gets his comeuppance. But this is more because of his behaviour than because of his humble background. After he leaves Kate for a glamourous young presenter she has to get herself together. She must find a job for the first time in her life, get a new look and a few new lovers. She is hardly a villainess but at least she achieves vengeance. Poor Geoffrey is abandoned by his mistress, loses his show and has a heart attack all on the same day. Kate surveys this scene with English good manners but refuses to have him back.

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The skin game

THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA
Hanif Kureishi
Faber £12.99

Gilbert Adair

The project of *The Buddha of Suburbia* is summarised, item by item, in its first three sentences:
"My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care—Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere."

There, pithily encapsulated, is the contract signed by Kureishi with his reader—basically the same he no doubt signed with his publisher—which the novel respects to the letter. No one can complain of disagreeable surprises (or agreeable ones, for that matter) lurking dormant and unheeded in its small print. There *is* no small print: what you pay for is what you get.

There too, alas, is what's wrong with this droll, digressive *Bildungsroman*, since a tenet not merely of modernism (or post-modernism) maintains that fiction of real and enduring value should always be in breach of contract with its own project. I enjoyed quite a lot of *The Buddha of Suburbia*. I enjoyed its raunchily graceful, giggle-inducing similes (Karim, dolling up for some decorous debauchery in Hampstead, describes his talc-powdered testicles as being "as fragrantly dusted and tasty as Turkish Delight") and the exultant relish with which it demythifies a few of the sacred *culturata* of the metropolis. But Kureishi's *curriculum vitae* (above all as screenwriter of Stephen Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette* and the underrated *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*), not to mention his current high visibility on the English cultural scene, led me to expect a novel that would be rather more than a programmatic recap of his gifts; more than, in classic first-novel fashion, "promising".

Aside from adumbrating Karim's picaresque progress through a dreary but also—as in his two films—carnavalesque London, his initiation into the splendours and miseries of (bi)sexuality and his seriocomic endeavours to make his way in the world of fringe theatre, those prefatory sentences give the game away in a second respect. They sound exactly like the voice-over narration of a film—a film, in fact, by Stephen Frears.

Much of *The Buddha of Suburbia* (a real misnomer of a title, as the god in question, Karim's amateur guru of a father, becomes marginal to the narrative after a handful of chapters) reads like an extended movie treatment. Its rambling apology for a plotline is charted mostly through some very speakable dialogue. It has, as did *Sammy and Rosie*, a wonderfully vivid and vocal supporting cast of suburban social-climbers, forlorn Indian immigrants, theatrical poseurs and gamey leftist radicals. And its "soundtrack", so to speak, is threaded through with rock standards which function as the instantaneously legible signifiers of its period (the early seventies). It might have made a good film, and it really ought to have.

But it does possess one virtue that operates with greater force on the printed page than it could ever have done on any screen. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is an utterly, unselfconsciously multiracial artefact. Karim himself, sexy, dusky and game for anything, is the offspring of a racially mixed marriage, and what lends his story its consistent energy and ebullience is the fact that none of the races in Kureishi's beige-y spectrum is accorded narrative supremacy over any other. Here at least, from surface to psyche, the equality is absolute. If such a strategy works more effectively in a literary context, it's simply because, the characters' racial origins not being infallibly determinable by either their names or their behaviour, one gradually finds oneself forgetting just which are white and which are not. This is an exploit impossible, for an obvious reason, in the cinema. For that, much may be excused.

Aftermath

LIFE AFTER LIFE: INTERVIEWS WITH TWELVE MURDERERS
Tony Parker
Secker & Warburg £14.95

Jenny Diski

"The bad dreams, they go on all the time... Sometimes they seem like bad dreams about bad dreams... That's just what they're not though, believe you me. This bad dream that I have bad dreams about, that's not a dream that's reality, that is, that I killed a man."

"All the time all through my life I've always felt completely fucked up in my mind. I've never known really what was real or what wasn't, whether it was people or feelings that mattered."

All of us have bad dreams, many of us are fucked up in our minds, but few of us have to live with our nightmares as reality. The 12 narrators in *Life After Life* are different. They tell their stories, not as we might, as a more or less continuous development, but as a sharply bifurcated narrative of event and consequence. There's none of the *beginning, muddle, end* quality that describes most people's existence. Here, 12 lives peaked in a moment, and the rest is aftermath. The peculiar simplicity of it makes these factual accounts read like almost perfect fictions.

Of course, the voices are taped and shaped—brilliantly—by Tony Parker, who barely appears, but is apparent throughout the book. He allows us to be lulled by ordinary voices speaking about their frequently unhappy, but often unexceptional lives, and then sends us reeling with disbelief at the sudden explosive description of a senseless or terrible killing that renders the ordinary beyond the borders of humanity.

There is no escaping our own voyeurism. In some cases described as *accidents*, you are no more than a book's thickness away from the perpetrator: it could have been you. You can almost see your own life in sudden ruin. Bad luck or panic is involved: the minor felon who used a handy stone to knock out a pursuing policeman didn't intend him to fall face down into a stream; the man whose wife fell down a cliff from a van when, he claims, the door slid open, was only pushing her away when she began hitting him.

Much more alien are the child killers, and the man who smashed a sleeping stranger's skull because he decided that he had stolen his new wrench. These men don't claim accidents—they are perplexed by their monstrous moment. None had any previous urge to kill. You wonder whether the distance you feel is real.

Only one of the narrators chills you with his cool logic. He is the youngest. His monologue bristles with amiability and politeness. At 14 he stabbed his grandfather in the neck for refusing to give him more pocket money. Seven years on, and out on licence, he explains: "The way I think about things now, is that it happened, it's over and done with and there's not much point now in dwelling on it. I'm sorry he's dead because I liked him, but there it is, he's gone and like I said I look on it like it was an accident, something that could have happened to anyone." The others are aware of the magnitude of their action. Trauma and isolation have made them think hard: "... inside here it's a hole, a big hollow empty hole... I don't have any excuse for what I did and there's nothing I can do that will undo it... but oh Jesus mate how many times I've wished to God someone'd come along and tell me how I could."

Some of the hardest men and women seem to have come close to wisdom, often helped by older prisoners—recidivists—who take the wild ones aside and talk to them about the need to stay human. Like spiritual advisers they suggest giving up self-destructive violence for learning and self-development. Like acolytes, the hard ones start to study and to know themselves. You have to check a surge of optimism in the perfectibility of humanity; and those in this very special group who have worked on themselves the most check the optimism for you.

In cases described as accidents, you are no more than a book's thickness away from the perpetrator: it could have been you

They are all too aware of the irony that their development depended on the taking of a life. They stay in touch with the horror which for most of us is only dream-time: "...twenty years after it happened I still can't believe it, that the person I'm talking about who did those things to his own child was me." ▶

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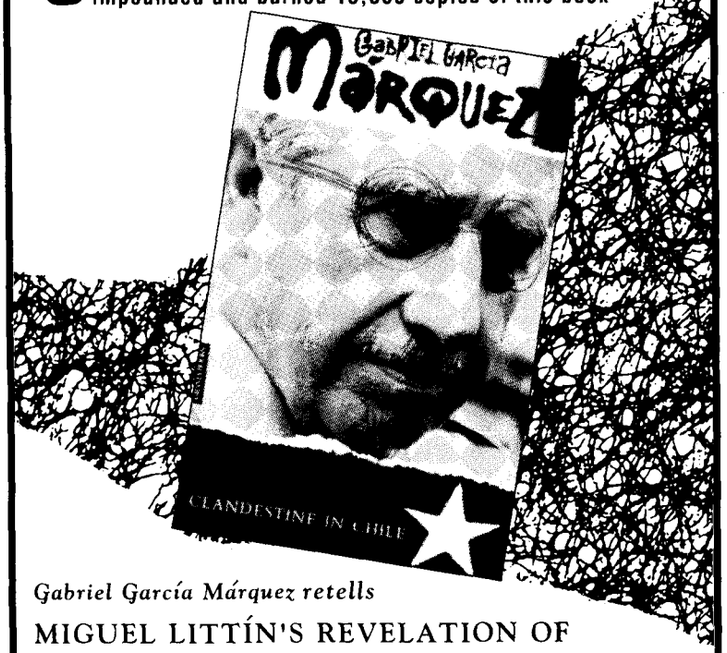

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Call for the dead

THE DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY 1981-1985
Edited by Lord Blake and C S Nicholls
Oxford University Press £40.00

Arthur Marwick

"The DNB is a monument to the Victorian age. It is a monument to private enterprise. No State subvention was sought or offered, no Academy or learned society sponsored it". Well, up to a point, Lord Annan. The original 63 volumes and Supplements One (those inadvertently missed out) and Two (those newly dead, 1901-1911) were heavily subsidised by publisher and speculator, George M Smith. Publication through the Oxford University Press (who took over in 1917, with a further series of decennial supplements) had depended on purchases by publicly funded institutions of education and scholarship. Leslie Stephen's main concession, as editor, to the "real world" was to prefer hacks who would deliver to experts who might not. Thus, for example, the insulting biography of Nell Gwyn is simply a mechanical transcription of 18th-century Hanoverian propaganda.

"Prefatory Notes" came with the supplements, and mark interesting stages in the evolution of cultural taste. It was the third volume (1961-1970, published in 1981) under the editorship of E T Williams which boasted of open treatment of homosexuality. Lord Blake, who did the Blakery, and co-editor Dr Christine Nicholls, who did the work, managed to get the roll-call of the glorious dead of the seventies into the shops by 1986. Their triumph was the inclusion of both Britten and Lennon, and they noted that "non-photographic portraits" were no longer included for every entry—mug-shots by Bacon, or even Hockney, they presumably thought would be of little value to future researchers. The basic source for initial selection, it was further explained, was *Times* obituaries.

The latest supplement is the first fully user-friendly volume: easy to handle as it covers only five years; out in four, so that the stiffs are almost warm. I won't be the only reader to cry, "Didn't know he was dead" (though of others one mutters, Irish-wise, "Didn't know he was still alive.") The *Times* is not mentioned; and we have the famous request to readers to participate in contributing to a new missing persons supplement. Blake and Nicholls have been particularly friendly towards reviewers, since their "Prefatory Note" is a digest of the jolliest snippets from the various entries and a summary of the "many walks of life" (Lord Blake's phrase, I fancy) from which the entrants are drawn. The categories "run from A (Actor), through M (Malefactor), to Z (Zoologist)".

Does this mean that Dr John Bodkin Adams (acquitted in 1951 of murdering a patient) is posthumously deemed guilty? Probably it's just a good story, well told by Percy Hoskins:
"Physically Adams seemed strong enough to withstand the trial but his facial appearance was against him. In a good humour and smiling he resembled a genial Mr Pickwick but in sombre, grim moments he tended to appear quite capable of the crimes soon to be laid at his door."

Amazing he got off, really. Blunt and Maclean are unequivocally under S, but Sir Maurice Oldfield remains (fairly) securely "C": there is no evidence that his private life "had prejudiced the security of his work at any stage in his career." Henry Hugh Arthur Fitzroy Somerset, tenth Duke of Beaufort, is, I take it, an L ("leading figure of equestrian activities"); perhaps in 2010 his like will be rated U ("upper-class twit"—or is that unfair to one whose activities "ranged from chancellorship of Bristol University to the presidency of the Battersea Dogs Home"?). After all, David George Browlow Cecil, sixth Marquess of Exeter and Baron Burghley, "athlete and parliamentarian", *was* the chap who "ran round the Great Court of Trinity College, Cambridge, before the twenty-third of the twenty-four noontime chimes."

One of the book's many fascinations comes from the matching of contributor to subject. Writing on Betjeman, old-man Amis growls at "one" not to "underestimate the sheer relief and delight to be felt at the appearance of a poetry of contemporary date that was easy to follow and yielded the almost forgotten pleasures of rhyme and metre expertly handled." But top marks to Hugh Johnson who generously credits James Mitchell of Mitchell Beazley Ltd with publishing "the most discussed and most imitated reference book of the 1970s"—hint: the book is called *The World Atlas of Wine.*

But biography *can* contribute to history. German-born Sir Robert Mayer (father of Thatcher's aristocratic opponent) is a nice example of the recruitment of an outsider into the upper class. It was the genius of Sotheby's auctioneer Peter Wilson which, with the staggering Impressionist sales of 1958, launched the hype and hyper-inflation which characterises the contemporary art market. Laura Ashley emerges as the Robert Owen *de nos jours*.

For the tearers off of masks, show-biz forms a happy hunting ground. Though David Niven's autobiographies followed his Hollywood publicists in giving his birthplace as historic Kirriemuir, he was actually born in boring Belgrave Mansions. Dick Emery's "childhood insecurity inhibited him throughout his adult life and prevented his undoubted comic genius from flowering completely". Well, up to a point, Mr Took. Quite a decent place, the DNB. Trouble, is, to get in, you have to be dead.

A horn of plenty

THE SONG OF THE HAWK
John Chilton
Quartet £20

John Fordham

The name of Chilton on a jazz biography is another word for "research", or maybe "devoted research". The author's earlier account of the life of Sidney Bechet was an inspirational survey in its detail, educated admiration, and sense of the artist's power both as a performer and an overwhelming influence.

In Coleman Hawkins, Chilton has picked one of the few saxophonists of comparable stature to Bechet during jazz's journey from folk-art to modernism. Hawkins, who died in 1969, is universally recognised now as the pioneering influence on a device that currently threatens to challenge the guitar as a popular instrument—the tenor saxophone. But though the horn's potential for tumultuous expressiveness, sweeping tonal variety and scalding density are now taken for granted, Hawkins came to it when it was used for little more than special effects. That he brought the tenor to life was partly due to inbuilt vision and an empathy with the innovations of black jazz. It also came from an interaction between intuition and musical education rare among early jazz players.

The Song of the Hawk will inevitably be compared with its predecessor on Bechet, that book growing out of Chilton's lifelong obsession. *The Song of the Hawk* more obviously retreats to track-analysis of records, possibly as a way of dealing with the life of a man who was famously self-contained. Coupled with Chilton's disinclination to convey much about the impact of a Hawkins performance, the effect of the early sections isn't overly inviting to non-specialists.

But by the stage of Hawkins' five-year stay in Europe in the thirties, the subject begins to expand. Chilton is much assisted here by the discovery of correspondence between Hawkins and a woman friend, Renée Gertler. The English period also provides a fascinating glimpse of Hawkins's effortless dominance by comprehension of structure. A local group of accompanists attempted to throw him by modulating a tune into another key in mid-stream and were astonished to find him negotiating the change without dropping a stitch, or ever refering to the stunt afterwards.

Chilton makes it clear that it was Hawkins's refinement of technique and theory to maximise choice that made him so different from the scores of jazz players who believed (as many still do) that "emotion" was conveyed by histrionics, special effects and dependence on the blues. Hawkins was a musician of immense sophistication, impatience with shortcuts and love of harmonic experimentation—he once said that the Brandenburg Concertos are as good a guide to his method as any.

That he was clearly a more elusive subject, and a less dramatic personality, than Bechet makes this primarily a book about jazz craft. But the finale of this great artist's life as an itinerant musician, living by choice on Remy-Martin and the odd bowl of soup, does painfully reiterate the familiar story of how brittle a purchase on life that craft has given many of its greatest exponents. Chilton has written a dense, sometimes dry, but lucid and immensely informed profile of a jazz colossus.

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Aleksandras Matsiyauskas/Lithuanian village market

Hope against hope

MOSCOW, MOSCOW!
Christopher Hope
Heinemann £14.95

Zoe Heller

Part of Stalin's legacy to the Soviet people was a collection of stupendously bad patriotic songs. Composed by his fawners, these were peppy numbers, for whistling while you worked. "Hello country of heroes, country of dreams, country of scientists" went the catchy lyric to one such anthem.

Corrupt fatuities like these are less likely to flourish in the era of *perestroika*. Indeed now that Soviet housewives fearlessly bad-mouth Gorbachev on TV, the temptation is to assume that the bad old days are gone forever. Christopher Hope, a frequent visitor to Moscow in recent years, is not so easily cheered. His portrait of the Soviet capital, at once melancholy and exquisitely witty, is a rebuff to the easy optimism of many western observers. *Perestroika*, he insists, is simply a "wordy holiday" for a few intellectuals; the Soviet system is just as fantastically awful as ever. "Nowhere, since I left South Africa, had I found a society where the talk was all of reform, of change, nor any place where less of it was seen."

In his vain search for evidence of real improvements, Hope certainly got around. The string of vignettes that make up *Moscow, Moscow!*, are testament to an admirably dedicated tourist. Beyond the *pro forma* laments about gloomy fortress-hotels, aggressively bad food and queues, there are wonderful accounts of schools, hospitals, orphanages, morgues, nightclubs and weddings. To all of them, Hope brings an eye for poignant detail and an insatiable appetite for a particular brand of grotesque that he designates "Moscow piquant".

He recounts visits to museums where photographs of full supermarkets and exhibits of modern consumer durables seem designed to "tantalise or merely to sadden" the deprived Soviet viewer. He tells us about the special free phone lines that have been set up for the thousands of terminally depressed Muscovites. He describes maternity units where visitors are not allowed, and computer lessons taught without computers. ("They show us pictures" one of the students explains gloomily).

Hope *loves* these moments of heart-breaking farce. He savours them with the intensity of a connoisseur. Had they not conveniently presented themselves in Moscow, one suspects he would have had to invent them—or abandon the idea of a book. This suggests that he is not perhaps the fairest commentator on the progress of Gorbachev's Russia. Swayed less by idological conviction than by aesthetic predilection, Hope was never going to be very interested in the brighter aspects of the *perestroika* story. With his taste for the deliciously grim and the terrifyingly ludicrous, it seems he *wanted* to encounter sinister apparatchiks, maddening bureaucrats, and disenchanted students struggling to learn about computers from pictures.

In consequence, this beautifully written book may strike the reader as rather unjust. It examines only those truths that suit Hope's style. Its evocations of flinty Muscovite misery are powerful, compassionate but utterly indulgent. Wallowing in the dark hypocrisies and terrible ironies of Soviet life can, after all, be just as short-sighted and sentimental as refusing to admit that they exist.

Coasting downhill

THE FOLKS THAT LIVE ON THE HILL
Kingsley Amis
Hutchinson £12.95

Anthony Quinn

By now we might assume that the name of Kingsley Amis stands either as a sufficient recommendation or a sufficient warning. Yet for some readers the notional split between the astute social satirist of the fifties and sixties, and the reactionary misogynist of the later fiction isn't quite so clean. Once, you felt that Amis was writing novels for People Like Us, skewering pretensions, railing against inequity, generally giving a hard time to those most deserving of it. By *Jake's Thing*, however, a tetchy conservatism seemed to have taken root, and the targets were no longer academe and the aristocratic fringe but women and psychoanalysis. The Amis readership had shifted, almost inmperceptibly, to People Like *Them*.

Those inclined to be defensive—and here I declare my hand—argue on two fronts. First, it is not always disagreeable to be annoyed by the blinkered ranting of the right: life would be less interesting without Julie Burchill and Peregrine Worsthorne. Second, and crucially, Amis is still *funny*. The knack of capturing the false starts and dead ends of everyday chatter, the gift for mimicry, the elaborate expressions of outrage—time has withered none of these. You wince as he drives a coach and horses over the liberal consensus, but you find yourself cackling like a maniac.

The folks that live on the hill both confirms and upsets what we expect in later Amis. Formally, it's another funny-sad comedy of social and sexual manners, cast in the old-farts-ensemble mould of *Ending up* and *The Old Devils*. Set in a north London suburb that bears passing resemblance to Primrose Hill, the meandering storyline centres around the mild-mannered Harry Caldecote, retired librarian, clubman, epicure, and an Amisian *alter ego*: "Arms cuts, State education and the Arts Council were the sort of thing he thought he was equal to seeing off". The trouble with Harry is that his leisurely pursuit of enjoyment is forever hijacked by his family's multifarious problems.

Brother Freddie is being slowly suffocated by the attentions of his appalling wife Desirée; errant son Piers is constantly sponging to finance a shady private life; Fiona, the niece of an ex-wife, has to be rescued from alcoholic misadventures; Bunty, stepdaughter of another ex-wife, needs protecting from a malicious lesbian lover called Popsy. And nice-guy Harry feels responsible for all of them.

As he resolves these familial headaches the book flips from living-room to saloon-bar to post-office via ubiquitous minicabs (if these characters had to walk anywhere the narrative might grind to a halt altogether). Amis's attitude to the demands of family life is curiously ambivalent. On the one hand they allow him some typically jaundiced sport. When Harry, Freddie and sister Clare (the book's most sympathetic character) visit their ageing mother " the four of them started to exchange information about those present and absent that they had no interest in acquiring and in many cases would have paid some small sum to be excused hearing altogether". Yet in his benignly patriarchal way Harry reaffirms the values Amis has frequently championed—decency, commonsense, "dislike of seeming a shit".

Unfortunately, one never quite shakes off the impression that Amis is coasting here. The nicely-timed barbs and the sentences that brim with sub-clauses are still a delight, but much of the writing is flabby and complacent. Aside from some token impersonations of cab-driverese, the dialogue is a homogeneous gruel where previously we were served a witches' brew of voices, idioms and registers. There is still a place for Amis's cantankerous comedy, but admirers will wonder why he has abandoned the cutlass in favour of a hat-pin.

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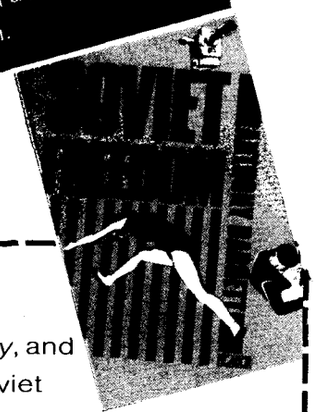

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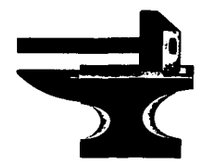

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Whispers of immortality

IN THE RED KITCHEN
Michèle Roberts
Methuen £11.95

Helen Birch

Michèle Roberts is an exquisite writer. For her, language is a precious instrument with which she traces the contours of the world, mixing its colours, identifying tone and shade and smell, as if failure to classify would cause it to crumble. Her meticulous realism invites comparisons with that much-maligned genre, the "women's novel" of the thirties, forties and fifties, when miniaturists like Barbara Comyns, Rosamund Lehmann and Elizabeth Taylor attuned their sensibilities to every frisson, every nuance and left the Big Picture to the boys.

Roberts's choice of themes—an enduring fascination with the arcane symbols of faith (specifically Catholicism) and attempts to relocate ancient myths through the lives of her modern women characters—are easily dismissed as parochial. At first glance, only the context has changed; the forms, the concerns remain the same. Like her forebears, Roberts is intelligent, serious, high-minded. She abandons shock tactics in favour of careful transformation, weaving the fine threads of language through the new territory of feminism and its ideas about sex, love, guilt and gender. Her book would not look out of place repackaged in dignified, tasteful Virago green.

But comparisons like these only serve to restrict Roberts's work to an audience of Drabble and Brookner fans. The development from her first, self-referential *Bildungsroman, A Piece of the Night* to her last, fictional reworking of the theories of French feminists Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, *The Book of Mrs Noah*, shows her becoming more and more ambitious. She refuses stable subjectivities and signs, scrutinises the rhythms of language, questions sexual difference and even writing itself.

In The Red Kitchen takes that well-worn feminist martyr, the witch, out of the closet and uses her to explore the history of the "feminine" unconscious. Sliding between the mid-Victorian era—that cusp of spiritualism and psychoanalysis, when History begun its collapse into modernity—and the present day, the novel links the lives of four women through the figure of a young medium, Flora Milk. As cookery writer Hattie King struggles to cope with the death of her baby, her house in Hackney breathes the spirits of its past inhabitant.

Hattie hears Flora at work in the red kitchen and sees visions of her childish *alter ego*, the Pharoah's daughter, who adopts the symbols of manhood, draws power by playing king. For ex-convent girl, ex-prostitute Hattie, cooking provides a route into the world: "Inventing then writing down recipes, I unmade and remade the world...learned to discriminate, to speak". For Flora, mediumship articulates repressed secrets, while gentlewoman Minny, in an acute parody of Victorian epistolary fiction, writes long letters of lies to her mother.

From these ingredients, Roberts conjures a delicately spiced repast. Through their spirit lives, the women share dreams of a common language and experience of incest, hysteria, guilt, death, birth, illusion. Their unspoken connections defy description, yet return to language in dream, in writing, in imagination. And their creator, the literary chef, pulls her words together, recombines them to make sense of the (other) world. *In the Red Kitchen* is fine, controlled, and yes, genteel. But it does not, for all that, lack a vision of the Big Picture.

Paperbacks

Promised lands

Robert Carver

Catching the world of the painter in prose is one of the hardest challenges a novelist can take on. The risks increase if the painter is one of the most famous of the French Impressionists. Eva Figes' evocation of one day in the life of the old, cunning but still passionate Auguste Monet in his garden at Giverny, (*Light*, Flamingo, £3.50), achieves lucidity, beauty and a precise location of emotion and sensibility in landscape. She has resisted the temptation to deal with an impressionist painter in impressionistic prose. Caution or design has led her to the understated, classic style Flaubert used in *Une Coeur Simple*. Alive to colour, form and movement in landscape, as well as the fluidity and range of human feelings, there is a charm, a sense of harmony which pervades the whole.

"Someone has been gingering up Cyril's social conscience" was the ever sardonic Evelyn Waugh's comment on an early, left-leaning edition of the forties literary magazine *Horizon*, which Cyril Connolly founded in 1939 and edited through to its demise in 1950. Michael Shelden's *Friends of Promise* (Minerva, £5.99) chronicles the vicissitudes of Palinurus and his crew, in love, in literature and in that tragi-comic haze that seems to surround wartime literary London, compounded of cheap gin, cigarette smoke and the smell of stale cabbage. As fascinating as the glimpses of Orwell, Dylan Thomas, Koestler, Spender and Quenell, is the shadowy, enigmatic figure of Peter Watson, a wealthy homosexual of aristocratic background and artistic tastes who bankrolled the whole operation. Only wartime restrictions on travel kept Connolly in London as editor; as soon as France and Switzerland were open for business again he was off, leaving the beautiful and sinister Sonia Brownell (later nearly Mrs Merleau-Ponty, and eventually Mrs George Orwell) to run the show. This sharp portrait of London literary life is highly recommended.

'A tragi-comic haze seems to surround wartime literary London, compounded of cheap gin, cigarette smoke and the smell of stale cabbage.'

Carlo Gébler has a thing about American cars from the fifties. Surprisingly, one of the best places for spotting these today is in Castro's Cuba. There, in a time warp caused by the US trade embargo, you can see Buick Centuries, Ford Custom Lines and—so Gébler fondly hopes— the almost legendary Cadillac Eldorado. *Driving through Cuba* (Abacus, £4.50) is his account of a journey made in a hired car through the island.

He is an informed, sympathetic observer who, perhaps because he is Irish not English, seems able to meet and talk to ordinary Cubans with a degree of intimacy rare in travel writing. He catches the strange blend of hispanic, Carribbean, US and Soviet cultures which makes Cuba so distinctive. It's clear he likes the people, but he can be tough on the system and the bureacracy. Unusually, he seems to have some grasp of economics. This book is required reading for anyone who wants to find out what everyday Cuba is like today. Perhaps inevitably, he never finds his Eldorado.

Still in hispanic territory, Gabriel Garcia Marquez tells the remarkable story of the Chilean film director Miguel Littin who was exiled after Pinochet's takeover. *Clandestine in Chile* (Penguin/ Granta Books, £3.99) is the true adventure of Littin's illegal return to his homeland, incognito and disguised as an Uraguayan *momio*, a mummified bourgeois businessman of stultifying dullness. As well as Littin, four or five foreign film crews, ostensibly in Chile to make innocuous documentaries, are there to record his progress for an eventual anti-junta movie.

It's a combination of Inspector Clouseau-like cock-ups and genuine danger and poignancy; even Littin's mother doesn't recognise him when he walks in the door of the family house. In the end a team of clandestine Chilean film-makers are shooting with him, and it becomes a race to see if he can slip out of the country before the secret police arrest him. He makes it—by the skin of his teeth.

The Doors have long been part of rock's legendary past, and Jim Morrison an ikon of wasted youth and beautiful druggy doom. Apart from his reputation as a superstar he's also something of a cult underground poet. Those who like to sit cross-legged on the floor inhaling illegal substances and chanting the lyrics of *Waiting for the Sun* or *Spanish Caravan* will welcome *Wilderness: the lost writings of Jim Morrison* (Penguin, £6.99). Others may suspect that it's all a spoof, a sort of E J Thribb in bells, bangles and existential beads, cobbled up by some countercultural Henry Root. The very short poems are all angst-laden, self-indulgent and West Coast-subjective, as if penned by a minor character from Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*, with lots of mandalas, blood and four letter words. It's difficult not to conclude that had he not been so famous and died so young these adolescent ramblings from a hippy Sid Rumpole would have been consigned to oblivion.

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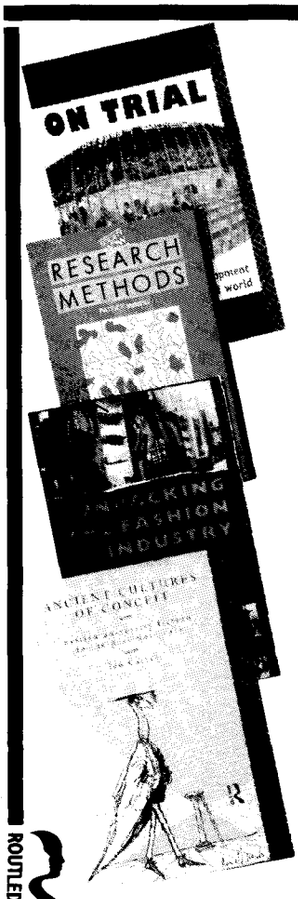

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ROUTLEDGE

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A cenotaph for the sixties

Robert Hewison on Yoko Ono coming to terms with the nineties

"A cenotaph is a monument without a body, and it is hard to resist the thought that the missing body is the murdered Lennon's"

For those who weren't around at the time, the return of the sixties may seem like farce repeating itself as history, but a serious reconsideration of a high, disingenuous decade has begun. 1988 released a tide of 20-year reappraisals, the Situationists have been reassessed at the ICA, Malcolm McLaren has had his retrospective in New York, and now Yoko Ono, historically more reviled than revered, has been recovered.

Riverside Studios are presenting a new version of the show seen last year at the Whitney Museum in New York. It marks her return to the world of art for the first time since 1971, when fans made a fiasco of her last show. Yoko Ono explains that **In Facing**, the title of the present show, which is making a world tour, refers to "a time that I am facing... really facing myself". From the other side of the dark glasses that put a screen round most of her face, it is difficult to judge what that self might really be. Across a gap of 20 years she faces her former self and, by implication, the nineties are invited to view the fruits of the sixties.

Ono was an established figure in the tiny New York avant-garde before an invitation to a month-long Destruction in Art symposium organised by the ICA brought her to London in 1966. She had been educated in America, where her father was president of the New York branch of the Bank of Tokyo. At the age of 23 she broke with her parents, and married an avant-garde composer, Toschi Ichiyananagi. At 29 she divorced him and married the American artist Tony Cox. Through Ichiyananagi she had met John Cage and La Monte Young, and her New York loft became the meeting place for the free-floating international Fluxus group.

Their chief impresario, George Maciunas called Flux art a non art which "forgoes all pretensions towards a significance, variety, inspiration, skill, complexity, profoundity, greatness, institutional and commodity value. It strives for non-structural, non-theatrical, non-baroque, impersonal qualities of a simple, natural event, an object, a game, a puzzle or a gag."

In contrast to the more violent Teutonic events that earned the organisers of the Destruction in Art symposium a £100 fine for mounting "an exhibition of a lewd, indecent and disgusting nature", the Japanese Zen tradition gave Ono's contributions a meditative quality. They were a mixture of performance pieces, minimal art works such as a canvas with a hole through which to view the world, or conceptual "wish pieces" or "instruction works": "Hammer a nail in the centre

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of a piece of glass. Send each fragment to an arbitrary address." Not particularly original, but enough to intrigue a pop star who had never finished his course at Liverpool College of Art.

The rest is a different history, but the Riverside show is not simply a retrospective of the surviving relics of Ono's artistic years. When asked to exhibit by the Whitney in 1989, she decided to cast many of the original pieces in bronze. Thus "Forget it" (1966), a stainless steel needle, now stands on a plinth beside "Forget it" (1988), a bronze reproduction.

The use of bronze makes an important conceptual difference. Again, it is not a particularly orginal idea. Jim Dine produced his bronze beer cans in 1960, but—precisely the point Dine was making—bronze is an expensive medium that has the power to confer semi-precious status on any object in which it is cast. In a catalogue note Ono says that she resisted the idea of casting in bronze when it was first suggested to her, but realising that the eighties were the age of commodity, she overcame her fears. It is also true that she could afford to. "I don't mind the reputation that I am an astute business woman... most widows have to do that," said Ono recently.

But if bronze evokes cattle farms, the grey Jag outside the Riverside or the apartments in the

DIY: Yoko Ono's Mending Piece 1966/1990

Dakota, it also makes a material difference. What was transparent is now opaque: "Painting to Let the Evening Light go Through" (1988) admits no light at all. The four "Glass Keys to Open the Skies" of 1967 have become the sullen bronze "Keys to Open the Skies" of 1988.

The reinterpretation which the bronze cover versions of the sixties originals invite is replicated by the slant now being put on Ono's work by her admirers. In a catalogue essay that includes a classic misquotation from Ono (for "unsuccessful" read "successful") Sarah Kent argues that Ono's most celebrated performance work, "Cut Piece", shows her to have been a protofeminist. The piece called for her to kneel for an hour in front of an audience, who were invited to cut pieces from her clothing with a pair of scissors.

It is true that Ono had to endure the oppressions of a sexist decade and the hostility of those who opposed her career moves. "Cut Piece" may indeed have invited men to confront "their potential for aggressive voyeurism", but the commentaries ignore the point that her instructions state the piece may be performed by either sex.

"Cut Piece", in fact, with its resonances of Japanese ritual suicide (*seppuku*), reveals one of those sado-masochistic fantasies that lurked within the sixties floral dreams. It appears in her 1960 instruction work "Blood Piece": "Use your blood to paint. Keep painting until you faint (a) Keep painting until you die (b)." (Is it significant that the only artist that Ono was prepared to name at her press conference as having influenced her was Van Gogh, whose "Ear Piece" makes him a fore-runner of autodestructive art?) "Blood Piece" may be conceptual, but she once said that she and John Lennon got into heroin in 1968 "as a celebration of ourselves as artists".

And there, the name is out. "In Facing" is about Yoko Ono, but Lennon permeates the gallery. His face appears in a still from her film *Smile*, and presumably his penis will be on display when *Erection* is shown as part of the accompanying season of films. Stories about him figure in his widow's wall-notes. But his presence is felt most strongly in its absence from the one major new work that the show includes.

"Painting To Hammer A Nail In" (1990) is a remix of a sixties original, in which gallery goers are presented with a hammer and nails to bang into a piece of wood on the wall. The participative gesture recalls the axe that hung in the first Dada exhibition. But the 1990s version, by its size and shape, makes a very different statement. The wood is in the shape of a 12-foot-high cross, which means that the nails acquire quite another significance.

Again, Ono states that when the crucifix shape occured to her, she resisted the idea, but then she felt she had to confront the weighty symbolism in order to free herself of it. But having conquered her fears, she readopts the symbolism, for a wall notice declares "I dedicate this piece to all martyrs in the history of the earth."

This martyrs' memorial, which dominates the gallery, reminds us that bronze is also the material for funereal sculpture and the plaques on cenotaphs. A cenotaph is a monument without a body, and it is hard to resist the thought that the missing body is the murdered Lennon's.

With each relic guarded by its nineties bronze replicate, the light spirits of the sixties are trapped in the heavy tomb of postmodernist reproduction. The ideas were delicate enough in the first place, and they only just survive the weight now put upon them. But in spite of the hostility which Ono can still generate, her slender work is nonetheless sincere. And there is something very poignant about "Untitled" (1988), for it has no sixties original, at least not here. It is a bronze cast of Lennon's granny specs. On its solemn plinth it is not an object, a game, a puzzle or a gag, but precious and expensive, and at the same time pathetic and opaque.

"In Facing" is at the Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, London W6 until 21 April.

Theatre

Death in the doll's house

Helen Rose talks to playwright Sarah Daniels

It was with some trepidation that I went to meet Sarah Daniels whose new play **Beside Herself** opens at the Royal Court this week. The power and anger of her most controversial work *Masterpieces* had been hard to forget—a heartfelt rage against pornography, the play had shocked and even disgusted audiences in the uncompromising manner with which Ms Daniels had presented her material. Yet even her first play *Ripen Our Darkness*, about a churchwarden's wife who commits suicide to escape the doll's house existence of domestic drugery (leaving her husband the immortal lines "Your dinner and my head are in the oven"), had already marked her out to the critics as a woman who "loathes men" and displays a "fanatically intransigent attitude to the sex war".

Flicking through reviews of her work the words "angry", "raging", "aggressive", "obsessive", even "X-rated", and the choice description of a "man-hating radical feminist" made me glad not only that I was a woman but also wonder what sort of fiery ogress I was to encounter in the genteel surroundings of Sloane Square.

The woman I had tea with came closer to some of the other descriptions of her work: "witty", "sincere", "provocative" and "very funny", her easy warmth and quick, frequent laughter a far cry from the man-eating harridan some of her critics obviously assume her to be. Sarah Daniels, unassumingly dressed in sweatshirt and jeans, and with short, neatly cut, dark blond hair, is almost disappointingly nice.

As a playwright Sarah may be outspoken but as a person, if not exactly shy (she has a horror of publicity and adamantly refuses to have her photo taken) neither is she particularly forthcoming, explaining by way of excuse that what she says in her plays is more important than what she says in an interview and nothing to do with the way she looks. "The whole thing about being 'famous' is empty," she says. "If you choose to do something creative then *that* is the way you express yourself."

Sarah has chosen to express herself loudly and clearly through plays which address issues based on society's attitude to women. Each work focuses on women's rebellion against an oppressive patriarchy, taking in subjects from a lesbian mother's right to the custody of her child (*Neaptide*) to the politics of Greenham Common (*The Devil's Gateway*); from the defiant pride of Victorian slaughterhouse workers (*The Gut Girls*) to male control of women's reproductive processes (*Byrthrite*). She has been

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Dinah Stabb plays Evelyn in *Beside Herself*: the real person aching to tell the truth

accused, in certain cases with some validity, of putting her sexual politics before her plot and letting her didacticism get the upper hand and it is ironic that what is probably considered her most successful play, *Masterpieces*, was the only one where she deliberately set out to create a drama about male violence towards women.

"In that way," she says, "I think it very much follows a continuum—jokes, harassment, pornography, snuff movies. But in my other plays I think that a lot of the criticism, male criticism,

"I'm terrified of something becoming sentimental or melodramatic. Jokes are my defence and if I'm honest I'd say they were a cover"

has come from an attempt to rationalise the emotions, and they can never know the anger which builds up. What I am doing is presenting women's experience of male oppression and my writing of men has been heavily criticised, but I have just as much validation from women who identify those characters in their husbands, boyfriends, fathers or friends." Sarah Daniels rolls herself another very thin, delicate cigarette with the same quiet consideration she answers my questions. She speaks softly, choosing her words carefully and deflecting awkward questions with a joke and a laugh. She appears both totally honest and discreetly evasive in her replies which can be rather disconcerting, especially as she accompanies this with a flippant wit.

Her latest play *Beside Herself* approaches the sensitive subject of child abuse, but like her other plays, mixes serious naturalism with anarchic humour and an unflinchingly accurate eye for the absurd and the desperate in normal people's lives. The play also questions the threshold of madness, showing how those in control of people whom society labels as "mentally disturbed" are living as much on the edge as their charges. The central character Evelyn has an alter-ego Eve who is many things: the child in her who refuses to let her forget her father's abuse; the real person aching to tell the truth; and the part of each woman which carries the blame and guilt of original sin. The play is as much about those who collude in denying the unacceptable realities in life as it is about victims of abuse. "I've tried, I suppose," explains Sarah "to explode some myths, the most pervasive of which is the self-deceit, the subtle collusion and silence surrounding the issue."

What marks Daniels' plays, apart from her frontline feminism, is her curious mixture of intense seriousness and slightly crazy humour as if she's trying to pull the carpet out from under her own feet. "I'm terrified of something becoming sentimental or melodramatic," she explains with a laugh. "Jokes are my defence and if I'm honest I'd say they were a cover. I really like humour, and using it I think adds a lot to a play. You can think more about it than if it is very focused."

Beside Herself opens with a prelude in which characters from the Bible find themselves in a supermarket. Delilah is cutting Mary's hair, Mrs Lot is reading *Family Circle* and Mrs Noah is off giving a seminar on how to survive a barbecue in a storm. Beneath the jokes runs the theme of how women have born the burden of guilt from Eve to the present day—making women perpetual victims in a cycle spanning 2,000 years. "I wanted a humorous scene," explains Sarah, "because of the heavy nature of the subject matter of the play and also because I could take liberties with these women. But I also wanted an historical perspective on how women have been blamed and I hoped this scene would lift the play out of a 'social play for today' slot." She pauses, considering, before adding. "But I also *loved* the idea of Hell as being a supermarket."

"Beside Herself" has just opened at the Royal Court theatre, Sloane Square, London SW1.

Music

Remnants of the avant-garde

Mark Sinker on the legendary Knitting Factory

Even considered on its own, as a small New York club catering to those who want music that's beyond labels, **The Knitting Factory** can fairly be called legendary. In only three years, it has expanded operations from its original two shows a night seven nights a week to encompass a radio series aired on more than 200 stations all across the States, which broadcasts music as recorded in the club. Now, on the strength of a global reputation for experiment, it's sending a selection of its regulars on a European tour.

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Jazz Passengers: bringing New York clubland to Europe

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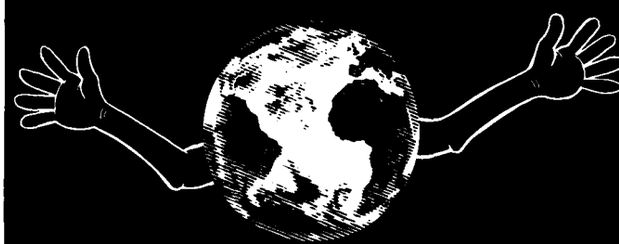

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ever was left to constitute an avant garde in music in the late eighties (the decade when subversion stopped being chic). By a mixture of luck and open-mindedness, Knitting Factory co-owner Michael Dorf and his various partners provided a much-needed space for innovative New Yorkers too spikily individual for ordinary jazz or rock clubs (such as composer-improvisors Anthony Braxton, John Zorn and Cecil Taylor), as well as a whole generation of musicians from all backgrounds with nowhere else to play.

The postwar history of music's avant gardes gave little obvious room for manoeuvre by the start of the eighties. European pseudo-scientific programmes had long fossilised, John Cage's What-Is-Music-Anyway? zen brain-teasers had made their point, minimalism was already glibly commercialised. In the late seventies, New York's punk underground had headed towards an absolute limit of art-gesture and nihilistic confrontation, crushing together the fragments of pretty well every postwar pop tradition and edgy highbrow experiment: the resulting scene, nicknamed the No Wave, lasted maybe four years before it variously gave in, burnt out, or moved on.

Certainly there's no simple way to typify the music that followed, as documented on two recent LPs (*Live At The Knitting Factory Vols 1 & 2*). As Dorf told me: "I think what's working is *not* having a philosophy, *not* having any preconceived notions." Some of it's noisy, some delicate, some difficult, some very direct, some bizarre, some not. It all comes after pop, but in many different ways: it's about difference, survival, about local focus after global input. It's about everyone speaking at once, and reaching out without selling out.

"The Knitting Factory isn't one scene," says Dorf. "It's really five or six very different scenes which occasionally mix. The only place where the mixture happens is the Knitting Factory." New York is a jampacked multi-ethnic community, which is the root of its problems as well as its energy. What The Knitting Factory offers is a variety of tentative, intuitive, variously successful forays into multi-ethnic musical language that can soundtrack this crackling polyglot co-existence, that can respect sources but still move beyond them.

So there's jazz here, but also multi-tracking, cartoonish speedcutting, collective improvisation, eccentric composition, and the outer edges of rock. Dorf certainly intends that people come expecting quality rather than category. The seven acts featured—Miracle Room, Bosho, Curlew, the Jazz Passengers, the Sonny Sharrock Band, Marc Ribot's Rootless Cosmopolitans, and Myra Melford—share little beyond a venue and a commitment to little epiphanies of mind-expansion. No one alone is especially radical or significant. But considering them together, and readjusting your aesthetic parameters accordingly, is one way back to the future. This is what the nineties will be about.

The Knitting Factory will be at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, 15 and 16 April. The first two volumes of "Live At The Knitting Factory New York City" are currently available on Enemy Records. A third volume will be released to coincide with the tour.

Dorinda (Holly Hunter) and Pete (Richard Dreyfuss) drink a toast to their relationship in "Always"

Film

Always a love story

Suzanne Moore on true love Spielberg style

It may not be possible to be too thin or too rich, but is it possible, I wonder, to be too popular? Take Steven Spielberg. He is the most popular filmmaker ever: he has directed half of the ten most successful films of all time. So it's strange that he has never won an Oscar and is not revered in the way that Scorcese or even Woody Allen is. Spielberg's films are still generally thought to be manipulative entertainment rather than anything else. How could something this popular ever be regarded as art, let alone great art?

The cynical dismissal of his work is littered with the well-worn put downs that are always summoned in the presence of truly popular culture: it is banal, sentimental, predictable and shallow, say the critics. But, even the critics have to admit grudgingly that somewhere along the line Spielberg manages to key into something that makes his movies a success from La Paz to Leeds. And though **Always**, his latest film, has opened to mixed reaction in the States, I think he's done it again.

Always, a love story, has been widely represented as Spielberg's first grown-up film. In fact, he has already made a love story. What else was *ET* but the tale of a little boy's romance with an alien? *Always* is perhaps more conventional in that it does feature a man and a woman. On the cards for some ten years, it is essentially an adaptation of the 1943 Spencer Tracy film *A Guy Named Joe*, though at moments it has flashes of Powell's *A Matter of Life and Death*. Like the Indiana Jones films it is full of knowing nostalgia for an age of purity and faith and a hankering for a kind of security that is no longer possible either in modern life or in modern movies.

The love story of Dorinda (Holly Hunter) and Pete (Richard Dreyfuss) is set amongst fire-fighting pilots. He is, of course, a courageous flier while she is a dispatcher who waits patiently on the ground while he does his derring-do. All this gives Spielberg the chance to inject some spectacular flying scenes using old war planes without the intrusion of anything so morally suspect as real war. Instead, Dreyfuss is a positively green hero risking his neck for the sake of a few trees and his best friend Al—the ubiquitous John Goodman of *Roseanne* fame, whom, you might like to know, has just been voted the sexiest man in America.

Dorinda, though tough on the outside (she wears boiler suits) is actually soft on the inside—she's worried sick about her man. Their relationship, outlined in a long opening sequence, is somewhat overstretched. It even includes a musical number in which Pete gives Dorinda "girl-clothes" in the form of a horrid dress that only some retard like Diana Spencer would consider wearing. Needless to say, Dorinda is immediately transformed from spunky tomboy to drippy female and waltzes around the canteen with a set of fighter pilots.

The whole thing gets a lot better when, in one too many feats of bravery, Pete pops off and finds himself in a field of daisies with none other than Audrey Hepburn. She plays Hap—a kind of New Age angel in white slacks and

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sweater who sends him back to earth to be a young man's guiding spirit. The young man just happens to be Ted Baker, a young pilot who is himself in the process of falling in love with Dorinda. Here the gears begin to shift and Pete has to come to terms with giving up his "girl" to Ted.

True love, the movie suggests, means letting go. And Hap mouths a lot of New Age/hippy platitudes in a thoroughly convincing way: "To gain your freedom you have to give it" and "The love that we hold back is the only thing that follows us here" and, best of all, "Time's funny stuff, Pete". The "here" she refers to might be heaven (if your idea of heaven is a meadow) or it might just mean death. This is the heaven of an agnostic. But Spielberg manages to play out his personal themes—around love, belief and sacrifice—in a way that mixes naivety with profundity.

This is Spielberg's forte because, whether you feel his philosophising is cosmic or comic, you cannot deny the way he taps into concerns that everybody has. Normally, we only refer to them in an off-hand kind of way, like the embarrassing area of spirituality. It is evident in all those action adventure movies that he can make with his eyes closed, but comes to the fore in his more personal work such as *ET*, *Close Encounters* and *Empire of the Sun*. In this context you can see why he was drawn to the transcendental humanism of Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*.

There is a consistent refusal to accept death as the end (even *ET* comes alive again) and a continuing emphasis on communication and

"In the real world we read our horoscopes, consult psychics and bore our friends"

connections that cannot be explained rationally—the telepathic messages of *Close Encounters* feature again in *Always*—that is both enormously attractive and resonant for audiences everywhere. Such popular mysticism is routinely dismissed by the left whether in the guise of intellectual anti-humanism or morbidly literal readings of materialism.

In the real world, however, we read our horoscopes, consult psychics and bore our friends with everyday instances of synchronicity. This world remains completely outside the realms of politics, mainly because it is continually belittled by it.

Spielberg does just the opposite. He elevates these concerns and integrates them into the most traditional of genres, whether it's the love story or the adventure movie. Some have read his preoccupation with loss and separation as a result of the childhood trauma of his parents' divorce. Yet this doesn't explain his universal appeal to all age groups. Officially, Steven Spielberg is now more successful than Disney. And for someone who provides "mere entertainment", he has an instinctive grasp of one of modernity's deepest secrets: that underneath we just want to believe. We really do.

Comment

Spot the sign!

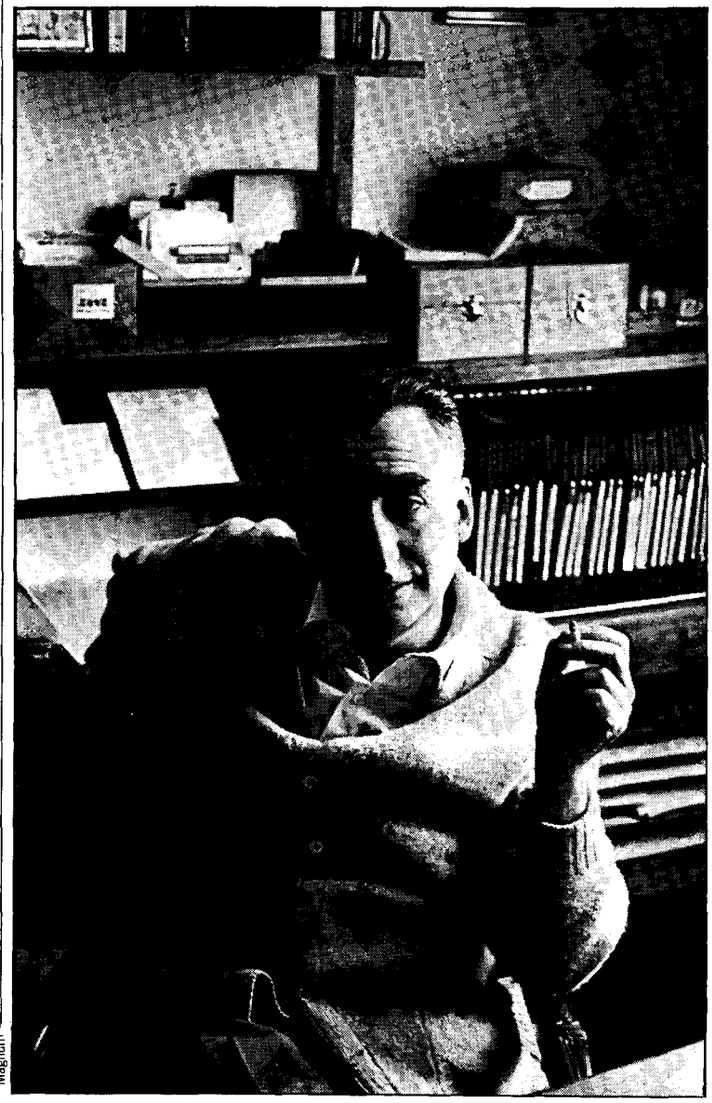
Richard Curson Smith and Steve Waters remember Roland Barthes

Where are you likely to stumble across the name or spirit of Roland Barthes? In among your party guests perhaps or lurking in the columns of our Sundays and style monthlies. In footnotes and sleevenotes. Around the table during research discussions at Saatchi's, over the photocopier or in the canteen queue at any college media department. In short, anywhere where observations or a reading of "the everyday" requires an intellectual absolution; anywhere where "culture" is muttered knowingly.

Ten years ago this week Roland Barthes died. A celebrated French essayist, literary and cultural critic, founding father of semiology—the science of signs—Roland Barthes seems like a passport to sophistication; to a land of illuminating insights into practically anything.

Barthes helped to propagate his own myth, he played the game. He was a public figure, to be seen as a pundit on glitzy TV specials from the Eiffel Tower or at chic nite spots around Paris (...imagine Raymond Williams holding court at *The Talk of the Town*!) As an academic his teaching methods were unconventional. And of course there's the fact and circumstances of his demise. Barthes himself noted that there will always be myth because there will always be death. His own, as a result of being run over by a laundry van outside the College de France, gave rise to a plethora of interpretations. (Was it a laundry van or a milk float? Was it a suicide bid? Is it true he was carrying a student thesis about press coverage of road-accident deaths?)

The obvious appeal of Roland Barthes lies in diversity. A list of some of his writing concerns gives the impression of an intellectual-without-portfolio. There was wrestling or steak and chips; Japanese pinball or the brain of Einstein. Authors from Racine to Robbe-Grillet and from the Jesuit Ignatius Loyola to the Marquis de Sade. There was "The Death of the Author" and a virtually impenetrable thesis on fashion magazines. A book about the traumas of love and another which dwells on a single photo- ▶



Magnum

"Is it true that Roland Barthes was carrying a student thesis about press coverage of road-accident deaths when he was run over by a laundry van?"

Roland Barthes photographed by Cartier Bresson in the sixties

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graph of his mother.

Barthes seems impossible to pin down. Each new project would veer off in a different direction as the moss of orthodoxy began to grow around the last. We can identify the witty iconoclast of *Mythologies*, unpicking bourgeois ideology with relish; the Barthes of the sixties applying structuralist linguistics to anything from literature to fashion; or a later, more personal tone which sees him training the camera on himself and tracing the pleasures of meaning.

For the reader of signs everything is a "language" to be deciphered. Barthes' problem was that *all* language ends by entrapping thought. The art of demystification itself soon developed such tendencies. As convention, it too had become myth. "What Roland Barthes wrote to disarm, his pupils armed themselves with."

This leaves Barthes with a rather unfortunate legacy. He's either taken too seriously or not seriously at all. His influence is trapped between the dry semiotic endeavour of the seventies and the gentler cultural debunkings that followed, now a feature of "supplement journalism". Fun though it is to "unpick" a curry or a Peter Greenaway film, that sense of danger, an indictment of sticky ideology is obscured; replaced by the cleverness of "blowing the gaff" on cultural artefacts. The sideways glance at culture that peppers so much of the media is often so fragmentary and confident in its virtue, that the whole process of unmasking resembles a parlour game of Spot the Sign!

The systematising of Barthes' concerns and his constant vigilance pushed him out into the realm of more obtuse and personal meaning. Fifteen years after the publication of *Mythologies* he wrote: "The problem is not to reveal the latent meaning of an utterance... or a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning." He would write about his own tastes and alienations, but his utterances no longer had the satisfying stamp of authority, and serious evaluation has consigned him to the margins.

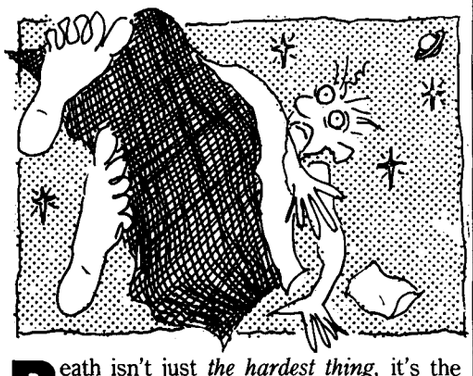
The marxist super-ego censures pleasure easily; historically. Taking his lead from Brecht, Barthes quite happily reconciled a project of socialism and the bourgeois art of living. His language was steeped in that culture... how could he deny the thrills of pleasure such languages afforded him? In 1974 Barthes visited China as one of several tourists of the Cultural Revolution. On his return he could offer only an insipid assent. "This was not understood at all: what the intellectual public wants is a choice: one was to come out of China like a bull crashing out of the toril in the crowded arena: furious or triumphant."

Complexity and wilful marginality are what make Roland Barthes valuable. His constant preference for the obtuse as against the obvious gives us a powerful sense of a new type of individualism. Not the heroism of the bourgeois subject but a new sense of the self as a restless perversity. With this "new self" comes a new ethics that of perpetually challenging the peace of mind that meanings offer it.

Television

The last gasp

What's a healthy attitude to death? asks Paul Morley



Death isn't just *the hardest thing*, it's the hardest thing to think about, to know, to make anything up about. About death itself, we know nothing, except that death itself does nothing but free us from the fear of death: for some it frees us from eternity, the eternity of waiting; for others it seals us inside eternity, the eternity of absence.

Just a few lines into this review—no, we're not discussing Fry and Laurie, or even *You Bet*—and already we can see, yet again, that death is the hardest thing to think about. There's nothing there, just the word, and the things we normally and abnormally associate with that word. We can only react to the death of others, and how death influences us and manipulates us while we are alive. We can only know death in life.

To think about death, to write about it, to represent it in any way, is to consider *nothing*, nothing but the live feelings and thoughts we have about not being here that flush through us time and time again because we are here. We fear it because to think about death, to think about something that takes away everything we are, is to think the most about life. I'm still not talking about *You Bet*. You might wish I was.

Irish poet Damian Gorman was, as he says during one of his many achingly candid interviews with the bereaved or diseased, motivated by the death of his mother to make **Nothing To Fear** (Channel 4, Saturdays at 6.30pm), a brief, meditative series on this "nothing", of how it shadows all our living moments, of how we usually try and ignore it. The three half-hour programmes are an exorcism for the authentically intense and sublimely puzzled Gorman, who is as insistent as Heidegger, or indeed Bruce Forsyth, on the need to face death as a reality, and never does Gorman slip away, like this reviewer from the steady, cruel, momentous aspects of the finitude of existence.

There's no room in the series for even a sly hint of a black joke. There is no relief, there are no answers, as Gorman bravely wanders through the practical and spiritual implications of our "precious mortality". He made the series while he was soaked in death: the death of someone very close to him, the anticipation of death of those he talked to, the death of the children of those he talked to. It's the closest Gorman can get to what death is: to talk with people who have just days to live, to talk to people on the morning of their mother's funeral, to talk to cancer surgeons, to talk to people who nurse the terminally ill, to talk to people who themselves grazed death.

Through these conversations, truly spread out in front of death and conducted with a kind of basic televisual amateurishness, far away from the slickly intrusive techniques of a Desmond Wilcox, a complex and palpaple intimacy emerges, a terrific atmosphere that builds up as Gorman takes our hand and clumsily and inexorably leads us into the phenomonal gap between somthing (life) and nothing (death).

Never once is he tempted to make a gag about *You Bet*, as this reviewer is: never once does he flinch from his task, there is no suggestion of escape, or softness, or collapse. He inches closer and closer to what we know all along and try to run away from: that death is nothing and it changes everything. He does all this knowing that there's nothing new to say, there is maybe nothing to say that make any sense at all, but it's clear from Gorman's gloomy yet quite lovely determination that, for the moments he made the programme if not all the time, a preoccupation with death is not morbid. It's clear that for him the so called healthy attitude to death, to ignore it, is itself morbid: unhealthy and escapist.

Perhaps we turn away from thinking and talking of death because once you start, you can't stop. As Gorman asks the most personal of questions, as he hears the devastated, lonely, courageous replies, the feelings are never of depression or brooding, but of protest, wonder, acceptance. And it's all for real: Gorman's relentless sincerity and respect for his interviewees, his quietly desparate and genuine need to know, the consistent closeness to death of the interviews, means that despite the primitivism of the production, the series features some of the most real, most demanding silences and tastes of death you'll ever see on TV, a kind of roughage of grief and guilt, love and panic. Never once does he succumb, like this reviewer feels he must when he feels himself drifting too far into the unknown, the unspeakable, to having a giggle about *You Bet*.

Gorman could, naturally, or supernaturally, go on for ever but TV wouldn't allow it: the series remains lost inside the schedules. So he has to stop, in a way that even Beckett didn't until he stopped breathing, and took that last gasp that this series is really about, the final breath that truly cuts you off from reality, so that nothing can happen. For real. Or not for real. Or for not-real. The final note of *Nothing To Fear* is, I suppose, uplifting: Gorman gets close enough to death, to nothing, to appreciate what Beckett had his Malone say: "The end of a life is always vivifying."

Perhaps after all I have been reviewing *You Bet* — as close to nothing as you can get.

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Full details and applications form from: **Jaqi Nixon, Department of Community Studies, Brighton Polytechnic, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9PH. Tel: (0273) 606622, extn. 251 or 244.**

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Further information and application forms from:
Dr. S. Ramon, Department of Social Administration, The LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. Tel. 01 955-7352, 955-7227.

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An Owl in a Sack Troubles No Man

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Once upon a time there were four little rabbits - Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail and Peter - and very delicious they were too. (The Tale of Peter Rabbit).

Robin Ravensbourne

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Bill Greenwell

Ayatollah Khomeini: I like to see a shapely pair of legs on a woman.

D.M. Stobbs

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Conferences

LANDSCAPE RESEARCH GROUP
Conference on 8th and 9th Sept. 1990

Landscape, Heritage and National Identity. Offers of papers bearing in any way on this theme are invited. Sessions proposed so far: "Constable Country"; Monuments and Their Meanings; Gender and Nationalism; Colonialism and Post-Colonialism.

Contact: Pyrs Gruffudd, Dept. of Geography, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD 0602 484848 x3402

Holiday Lets

COTE D'AZUR, English owner offers quiet, self contained studio for three months let, 15th of June onwards, in old Provencal Village, 20 kms from Nice. Superb sea views. Telephone: 010 33 93 24 71 72.

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RETIRED MAN seeks persons/companions for sailing 34ft westerly south coast April/May possibly French canals-Med June share costs. Box (09) 103.

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SCARCE BOOK SERVICE list wants 01-876 7254. Hammersmith Books, High Street. London SW13 9LR.

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INFAMOUS MANCHESTER R&B BAND "New Deal" requires gigs outside North West. No hype, no money, just good music. Please telephone: 061 928 4341.

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EXCHANGE—SYDNEY Feminist sociologist seeks exchange with similar January-July 1991. Write R. Pringle. Sociology Department. Mac Quarie University, Sydney, 2109, Australia.

Projects

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Work out how to make a video of oral history, community memories, or personal reminiscence, at a HEN HOUSE weekend.

4-7 MAY

Details: 0472 840278

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HI-SOCIETY! House Parties/Theatre/Euro-Weekends with associate groups—for all recognised Charities. Affordable monthly event programme: Telephone Anthony Harrison on: 01-586 5789.

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THE MIXED SALAD. A Club where unattached, cultured, and intelligent individuals can mix, share affinities, talk, relax and eat well. Membership will depend on personal interview and members will be placed on a club register. There is no age limit. Invitations will be compiled from this register and these will be extended to an equally mixed group of single men and women, people of compatible interests and tastes. Members are asked to a private Shropshire country house set in large and tranquil gardens. Harmonious and sympathetic surroundings. Exceptional scenery. Good conversation. Log fires. Telephone: 0584 73207.

ASIAN MARRIAGE & FRIENDSHIP Bureau International welcomes non-Asians. All areas/ages. DNSS, 181 Melton Road, Leicester. Tel/Fax 0533-610266.

WIDOWER professional, n/s, retired, leftist, still learning, seeks slimish woman for warmth, travel, growth and more. London/Kent area. Please write to Box (09) 108.

GENTLE RECONSTRUCTED MAN, humourous, intelligent, aware, warm-hearted, courageous, trustworthy, unattached, sought by similar woman, 50 years young, who believes you exist somewhere, for joint ventures/mutual enjoyment. London area initially. Box (10) 116.

ATTRACTIVE WOMAN, 38, TALL, slim, lively , ecologically-minded, enjoys foreign films, expeditions near and far, Jungian psychology, other creative, cultural interests, seeks compatible man, 30-42ish, who lives in London. Prefer non/light smoker. Box (11) 128.

ARE YOU an otherwise happily married lady, under 50, who would enjoy a "sometimes man" for an exciting, deeply satisfying sexual relationship? Millionaire businessman, 45, tall, dark and "nearly but not quite handsome", romantic, educated, reliable, discreet, workaholic married to his work would love to hear from you. Absolute discretion assured. Daytime get together possible if evenings inconvenient. Photo if possible please. Phone number essential, discreet daytime contact. Write Box (11) 123.

GOOD-LOOKING WOMAN GRADUATE seeks good-humoured man. You and I are London/SE based, leftish, 48+, unattached, like cinema, exploring places and things. Box (12) 151.

HOME COUNTIES. 48-year-old widow, in PR, petite blonde, attractive. Interests: travel, walking, bridge, tranquil home life with good conversation, music—seeks male companion (age immaterial) of highest integrity. Sense of humour and kindness important. Box (12) 152.

WOMAN (41), DARK, SLIM, 5ft 7in would like the company of a kind, intelligent humorous man. I would enjoy eating, drinking, walking, films, music and chatting seriously and light-heartedly with friends. London or surroundings. Please write to: Box (12) 138.

SLIM, ATTRACTIVE, INTERESTING MALE (34), seeks long-term relationship with gregarious, well-balanced, attractive woman (26-36) for giggles in bed, children, cinema etc. London based, but will travel. Photo appreciated. Write to Box (12) 139.

MAIDENHEAD MAN (49) 6ft 2in, urgently seeks, preferably local, female (30-45). My interests are sailing, skiing, current affairs, theatre and cinema, but don't let these put you off. Please write to: Box (12) 140.

LESBIAN COUPLE SEEK SPERM DONOR — strictly NO involvement. Must be prepared to have Aids test, and confidentiality assured. Write to: Box (12) 141.

MATURE, CUDDLY WOMAN just turned 50, seeks male companion to share friendship, humour and fun. Midlands. Please write Box (12) 142.

EDUCATED, VEGETARIAN AMERICAN WOMAN (40), two sons (9 and 11) likes music, theatre, adventure, seeks intelligent, caring, non-smoking man (40s), to share life's rich tapestry, (Northwest). Box (12) 143.

TOO SELF-SUFFICIENT FOR TOO LONG. Good looking feminist needs (I think) slim, 40s (or younger) male to explore her needs and his. Pluralistic politics and usual interests. London based. Write to Box (12) 144.

MALE, LATE THIRTYSOMETHING, intelligent, articulate, together, adequate, presentable but unattached, seeks similar female companion for things best shared—initially theatre, pubs, dining, London life. Write: Box (12) 145.

EDUCATED MAN, widely travelled, recently retired to small country house in Gloucester/Worcester area, divorced, seeks intelligent, not too left-wing, female companion for occasional weekends of good talk, country walks and uncomplicated relationship. Box (12) 146.

ADVENTUROUS WIDOW 60+, sexually active. Interests: travel, theatre, the Arts, wining, dining, seeks like-minded cultural sophisticated gentleman for occasional meetings in the London/Wiltshire area. Write Box (12) 147.

WOMAN, 44, NOTTINGHAM Lively and good humoured—sociable, socialist would like to meet a like-minded man, 35-50. Please write to Box (12) 148.

WOMAN TEACHER (50s), Francophile, painter, bookworm, seeks male friend with Arts interests for London leisure and holiday travel. Enclose photo. Write Box (12) 149.

LIVELY, FUN-LOVING WOMAN, young 40. Loves veggy food, theatre, conversation and French travel. Seeks lively male to share with. East Lancs. Write to Box (12) 150.

LONDON WOMAN, YOUNG ACTIVE 49, in helping profession. Enjoys visual arts, creating interiors, learning languages, travel in Africa and Europe, yoga, riding, but tired of independent lifestyle. Would like to meet reflective, sociable man to share love of arts, landscape, beauty and exchanging idaes. Preferably spiritually and politically alive. Box (10) 109.

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VOLUNTEER NOTICE BOARD is a free service provided by New Statesman & Society with financial assistance from Thames Television's Help programme. Interested organisations are invited to send their copy (approximately 45 words) to Dawn King at New Statesman & Society, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London, E2 8DQ by Friday preceding publication date. Please note this service is for recruiting volunteers only. If you have salaried vacancies contact the Classified Department on 01-739-1645.

RETIRED TEACHER wishes voluntary work with children, especially difficult children. Some recent experience voluntarily with 5s to 11s in independent school and play schemes. 68, sound health, no liabilities. References. Modest investment possible. Anywhere. Ernest Laban, Stoneleigh Lodge, College Lane, East Grinstead, West Sussex.

OXFAM shops run against the grain—it would be a shame to lose them—community commitment to those who have so few opportunities to even make a start. Help us keep OXFAM shops exciting. Volunteer to be an Oxfam shop helper. Ring 202 2245, or call in if you can find four hours a week.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED for small, busy children's charity in the city. Either a regular commitment to office work (no qualifications are necessary) with all expenses paid, or a week's commitment during July/August to accompany a child on an adventure holiday. For details please ring 01 236 3632.

NCH CARELINE is a free confidential counselling service for people with family and relationship problems. We offer telephone and face to face counselling, the latter by appointment. We are at present receiving volunteers to train as counsellors. Travel expenses are paid. If interested, please contact Maggie Nicholls on Cardiff 390815 or 229461.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED for residential community in Devon working on building, environmental and social projects. Cheerful personality is more important than skills. For information ring Leslie or Sandra on 036 37 228

THAMES HELP

Thames Help, presented by Jackie Spreckley, is a four minute local social action programme. It appears three times a week on Thames Television at 6.50pm approximately (check TV Times for details). Here is a summary of this week's programmes.

This week we are looking at the possible effects on patients of the new contracts which have been issued to general practitioners.

Tuesday 3rd April - The Doctor's View

Last August three out of four GPs voted against their new contracts which are being imposed on them as part of the Government's planned reforms of the National Health Service. On tonight's programme Jackie talks to Dr. Marek Koperski about his fears for the future of general practice.

Wednesday 4th April - The Patient's View

Many people, particularly the elderly and the chronically ill, are worried that they will no longer be welcome customers as doctors strive to make their practices more cost-effective. We talk to Jack Graham, an elderly patient who has heart trouble, about his worries regarding the kind or care he will receive under a reformed health service and we offer reassurance to those patients who fear GPs are no longer going to want them on their lists. Family Practitioner Committees are duty bound to find a doctor for everyone.

Thursday 5th April - Health Promotion

The Department of Health is urging doctors to do more routine screening and health education with their patients. But is the Department going about it the right way? We talk to Dr. Janet Kirton, a GP in an East London Practice, about the kind of health promotion which they do within the practice and how the changes in the new contract will affect that aspect of patient care.

For information on all the above programmes, write for our leaflet 'Making the Most of Your Doctor' to Thames Help, PO Box 2LP, London, W1A 2LP.

THAMES TELEVISION

Thames Help, Thames Television PLC, 149 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9LL. Telephone: 01-387 9494.

LAY VISITORS in Westminster are local people who make unannounced visits to local police stations and speak to the detainees to make sure that they are properly treated, understand their legal rights and that they are held in adequate conditions. If you are interested and live or work in Westminster contact: Mark Rollinson on 798 3258

THE NAMIBIA SUPPORT Committee is seeking volunteers to help in its busy N. London office. All levels of offered commitment appreciated, reasonable travel expenses paid. Contact: Namibia Support Committee. PO Box 16, London NW5 2LW. Tel: 01 267 1941.

BLACK VOLUNTEERS are needed to help the Otter Canoe Group for children with special needs in South London. The children in our group are from ethnic families. We meet every Monday evening in Battersea, between 6.30 and 10.30pm. Please contact David or Celia on 01-733 7210.

MEDICAL CAMPAIGN Against Nuclear Weapons and the Medical Educational Trust need volunteers to help set up a Resource Centre at N. London office - cataloguing and/or skill with GreenNet computer network appreciated. Travel expenses paid. Please phone Ian Lee (272 2020) or write 601 Holloway Rd, N19 4JD.

LEICESTERSHIRE NHS Alert. Volunteers needed to help with organising a series of public meetings. General admin and other social & campaign events. Please contact: Reen Adams, 1 High Leys Drive, Oadby, Leics, LE2 5TL.

PARENTS against Tobacco is an exciting one-year campaign with a lively and varied agenda of activities, and a very busy Euston office. We're looking for volunteers to help out, mainly with office work, in the daytime or evenings. For experience of a campagning organisation, tel Louise or Margaret. Phone: on 01 278 9686

ANY SPARE TIME? Volunteer literacy tutors urgently needed to work with ex-offenders in Southwark. Training starting on May 3rd (evenings). Open evening for more information on 29th March, 7-9pm, at Summer House Sumner Road, Peckham, SE15. Phone 252 8022.

KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA, Age Concern need both short and long term volunteers to offer emotional, moral and sometimes practical support on their home from hospital scheme for elderly residents of the borough being discharged from both Westminster and Charing X hospitals. Training and support provided and encouraged, and travelling expenses paid. For details please contact Judith Knight on 938 3944

WOMEN URGENTLY NEEDED to live and work with long-term homeless people in Glasgow – in small group homes, or as part of our outreach team, contacting and offering friendship to people sleeping rough. Full board and lodging provided, plus weekly personal allowance. Minimum commitment 6 months, preferably a year. To find out more, contact George McKelvie, at Glasgow Simon Community, 133 Hill Street, Garnethill, Glasgow G3 6UB. Tel: 041 946 2053

FELTHAM Citizens Advice Bureau in the London Borough of Hounslow needs volunteer advice workers. Full training will be given after selection. Challenging and rewarding work. Minimum commitment of 2 days per week, flexible hours can be arranged. The Feltham Bureau positively encourages all applications from all people, regardless of sex, race disability, marital status, sexual orientation, age or creed. Phone Chris Morris or Jane Jewell on 01-890 2363.

RIGHTS & JUSTICE – independent human rights organisation aiding African & Middle Eastern refugees in this country, needs committed volunteers in busy Islington office and at Heathrow. Knowledge of relevant languages especially Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic would help. Work to include interviewing refugees, and also attending Immigration interviews. Instruction will be provided. Contact is Alasdair Mackenzie on 01 359 4026

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ENDGAMES

WEEKEND COMPETITION

No 3118 Set by Tom Foolery
Boswell on Johnson's tour of Basingstoke, Torremolinos, Belfast or anywhere you think Johnsonian reflections would be apposite.

Report by Grace Elegy
I think you must all have exhausted yourselves pretending to be Dickens last week. Your Boswells were atrocious. There were only two who came anywhere near (Ransome-Davies and Greenwell) and a runner-up (Yorke) who, out of charity, I'll allow five pounds for effort. The winners can have fifteen each for overcoming what must have been enormous difficulties—if the other entries are anything to go by—and achieving a reasonable standard. Pull your socks up.

We had a comfortable night at the Marisol, though Johnson affected a distemper with the hotel, repeatedly calling it, in tones loud enough to be heard by our young compatriots, "My arsehole". After a breakfast much in the English mode which repaired his peevish spirits we descended to the beach, for Johnson had vouchsafed an interest in the Wet T-shirt Competition. I was not averse myself to the sight of these Aphrodites in their drenched smocks; however, Johnson took half my pleasure away by declaring: "Sir, are these English maidens? If so, it is a curious pleasure to impersonate the Scotch, who are by nature immodest and by climate liable to saturation. Whatever the case, it can be no novelty to you, Boswell."

With this he quickened his pace towards Elvis's Bar, and it was as much as I could do, in the engorged state of my breeches, to match his speed.

Basil Ransome-Davies

The distressing sight of so many idle persons encased in cardboard boxes and eating mournfully from newssheets provoked a lively conversation on the topic of fish and chips. I offered to remark that they could not be without nourshment or they would not be consumed in such prodigious quantities. Dr Johnson. "No, Sir. Gluttony may account for much." A beggarly man approached Dr Johnson and requested alms of him. Dr Johnson. "I am not in the giving vein." (For it was ever his habit to enlighten mendicants with suitable passages from Richard III.) Mendicant. "Oh yeah? Then I think I might open one of yours." Here he produced a kitchen utensil of great sharpness. "No, Sir. Whereas Aristotle gave it as his opinion that to satisfy a demand upon compulsion, even to the eleemosynary, cannot be termed generous, yet here is a farthing. Let it serve to quell your surgical propensities." I marvelled at his greatness of heart. Dr Johnson. "No, Sir. Pusillanimity will do anything and say even more, be it never so ridiculous." Yet I could not agree, which was rare, for I had been stunned by a flying wooden object affixed with wheels...

Jim Yorke

We went and saw Exeter. Dr Johnson was curious to see the seventeen new shopping malls so recently constructed. When we arrived at the fifteenth, I remarked to the company, that such a grand scheme would much benefit that noble city, for it should surely attract innumerable travellers who might otherwise have stopped short at Bath. JOHNSON. "Ay, Sir, for who shall gainsay that Habitat, Next, Our Price, Boots and Sainsbury's shall be a more profitable experience for the touring public in this city, than in another so many miles to the north." BOSWELL. "Is not the motorway then a boon to these citizens?" JOHNSON. "No, Sir, not to the citizens, for their buying and selling must be accomplished in Bath. These shopping malls are not designed for the Exonians; the new truth is that a man must purchase his victuals at a place sufficiently remote from his place of domicile, as to make him a seasoned and perpetual visitor. The new creed is that familiarity breeds a tourist."

Bill Greenwell

No 3121 Set by Tim Hopkins
Can we have famous love scenes from literature as they would have been written by Andrea Newman. 250 words max and in by 12 April.

GRAFFITI BY PAIGE

NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY

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Gilbert Adair is the author of a forthcoming novel, *Love and Death on Long Island*, published by Heinemann later in the spring. **Helen Birch** is editor of *City Limits*. **Alexander Cockburn** is author of *Corruptions of Empire* and co-author of *The Fate of the Forest*. **Richard Curson Smith** and **Steve Waters** are working on a television film about Roland Barthes for *The Late Show*, to be shown on 5 April. **Robert Hewison**'s forthcoming book *Future Tense: A New Art for the Nineties* will be published by Methuen in May. **R W Johnson** is a fellow at Magdalene College, Oxford. **Hilary Land** is professor of social policy at the Royal Holloway and Bedford New College. **Cyril Lin** is a research fellow at St Antony's College Oxford and programme director for the Modern Chinese Studies Centre in Oxford University. **Arthur Marwick** is professor of History at the Open University; his updated *British Society Since 1945* will be published shortly. **Angela McRobbie** is senior lecturer in Sociology at Ealing college of Higher Education. **Elizabeth Wilson** is author of *Adorned in Dreams* and *Hallucinations*, and teaches at the Polytechnic of North London.

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